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This all started with an email I sent to a group of my online peers and friends in January. The subject line read: An invitation to change the world with me (sort of).

"I turn 41 on February 5th and was thinking about the blog post I want to write for the day as I have done for the last eight years. And as I mused on how I'm loving being in my 40s, I realised I don't often see posts and articles about how getting older is actually really fantastic. I see blog posts from women in their 20s freaking out about turning 30... i see traditional media telling me I'm rapidly approaching my sell-by date... and as for being a single woman in her 40s? Let's not even go there.

But this is not how I'm experiencing getting older.

The empowerment I'm feeling is so utterly delicious, it cancels out the changes in my body that I'm slowly learning to accept and work with.

Pm so hungry to hear positive stories about aging
— Pm guessing there are a lot of women out there
feeling the same. Needing the same. Can we step up
and share our stories? Do you feel it too?"

The resounding YES! I received back in my inbox confirmed that I was on to something.

Growing older in a part of the world that glorifies youth can really mess with your head, especially if you're a woman. If I want to know how to "stay young" there are plenty of magazines, books, TV programmes and products that will help me in my quest. The shelves are positively heaving with antiaging this and anti-aging that. But I have to really search for examples of aging as something to not only accept, but to downright CELEBRATE. Clearly it's time to do something about that.

This collection of essays is our heart-felt celebration of the joys and wonder of getting older. We hope you find something to inspire you in these pages, whether it's the recognition of the woman you once were, the woman you are now or the promise of the woman you will become.

Because it really does get better and better.

From our hearts to yours,

Susannah x

INTRODUCTION

WHAT AGING MEANS TO ME

Denise Andrade-Kroon



And it was at that age ... poetry arrived in search of me...

And I, infinitesimal being, drunk with the great starry void, likeness, image of mystery, felt myself a pure part of the abyss, I wheeled with the stars, my heart broke loose on the wind.

Pablo Neruda

This poem sent shivers down my whole body the other day because I've been thinking about age and aging and the words "felt myself a pure part of the abyss"...sort of defined what has been happening to me as I grow older. I have always had such a wandering spirit and have questioned why I never really felt like I belonged anywhere. Bits and pieces of me, yes, but not the whole of me in any one place.

What I've come to grasp in the last two decades of my life is that there is finding in the (un)finding... belonging in the (un)belonging... that we are all part of this grand Universe, this "abyss" and our very (be)ings and the ripple effect we have on each other is important, each of us deeply important... spirit, soul, earthly connected.

Aging isn't what I imagined it to be for me. I thought I would be utterly consumed with my body changing and wrinkles and gravity on what surrounds my bones. And there are moments when I do gasp at these changes but they are fleeting.

What I'm loving so much is the wisdom, from all of the achy parts of life, sweeping me up and moving me through what is my now. I feel more comfy in my skin than I ever have and I know myself deeper.
I see my body as a being carrying my spirit and I

listen deeper to it, I honor it and find it precious:
The Keeper of my Soul. Like right now, I've had
pneumonia for two weeks and where before I
would push myself to please others, I am listening
to what my body needs, I am speaking up about
what my body needs and realizing that me being
unwell is not good for the loves in my life. There is
a ripple effect, always. If I take better care of me, I
can take better care of my loves.

Perhaps what comes with aging for me is being deeply intimate with all the layers of myself, which then guides me in what I can offer to this Grand Abyss called Life. Perhaps what comes with aging is less of a desire to impress and more of a desire to BE myself completely without need of recognition. Perhaps what comes with aging for me is learning what matters most and pouring my reserves into those people and things that fill me up rather than deplete me.15 years ago, heck maybe even 10 years ago I may not have posted this image of me (above) because of the not so flattering angle of my short and muscular legs. I wanted to be something different, perhaps longer and leaner than I was and today, I love my short and muscular legs. They carry me and they help carry my heavy son up and down the stairs and they wrap tightly around my husband and hold

him close. It feels good, so good to feel this way and what I see in this image is the woman I have become and the little girl that still lives within me -- feeling connected, intertwined, accepted, embraced.

20s, 30s and now my 40s. I feel so blessed to even be here to write these words about aging and yet I know there is so much more, so much more wisdom to gain.



denise andrade-kroon

Denise Andrade-Kroon is a gentle and wild soul seeking romance, light, connection and Spirit through images and words. The fae lands of the Pacific Northwest is where she has found hOMe with her husband and 5-year-old son. Walk, dance, or be still alongside her at Fae*Soul.

BORN AGAIN AT 41

Marisa Anne

I'm writing this on the eve of my 41st birthday, actually 29 minutes until to be exact.

Since Susannah, aka my <u>aquarian twin</u> (I have to say it's such a treat to share a birthday with her, born just one day apart, it's as if we have been and always will be on this journey together) wrote to a group of us a couple of weeks ago about her idea of sharing the 'truthful tales of how getting older rocks', I've got to be honest and say that this prompt got me thinking about if it really does?

But you know me, if you know me, of course I'm going to come back around, to yes! it most certainly does. It has just been a particularly tough couple of months and/or past year in several ways and I'd be lying to you if I didn't acknowledge that.

But at the end of the day, there is that knowing that seems to hang on in even the darkest times, the place in us that recognizes that this is an amazing time too, even if it is momentarily masquerading as crap. Life, to me, is still magic.

And how do I know that? I know because as I sit here listening to music with my man on the eve of my birthday, reflecting on times past, all the memories are good. They just are. And believe me, I remember when some of those very same moments also felt really hard. It's as if all the experiences just blend together and what I'm left with is a profound gratitude.

Where am I going with all of this? Here's where: What you have in the early part of your life is this freedom from awareness. No matter how well meaning those older than you are, advising you to appreciate your childhood, your twenties, your thirties, reminding you that the world is your oyster; you're just never going to get it. You are never going to appreciate the time you have in the way you should because you simply can't. You have no hindsight. You haven't lived enough yet to have it.

But when you're 40... You know that age that seems to freak people out a little? The same age that many almost universally say is the moment when they first felt the most *in their skin*. Like they finally caught up with themselves? It's true. Literally a couple of weeks after I turned 40 (I had to adjust) I felt like myself for the first time. It's fair to say that growing up an only child, spending a significant amount of time with adults, mostly connecting with friends older than me I have always felt ahead of my years. There were moments in my twenties when I actually yearned to be 40 because I knew that the world and the people in it would finally make sense in the way I had always observed it to be. And that's exactly what happened.

A coming of home of sorts. I have the awareness now to see all the good around me as it's happening *and* I still have my youth.

Notice that I didn't reference 'the earlier part of life' as 'when you are young' because I have observed that youth is relative, that it is more about a daily decision than it is about how many years you've been on the planet.

I couldn't remember if I announced my age last year, but I did. And I'm so glad I did. Because these can be the years when you start becoming less enthusiastic and anticipatory about the number and the birthday all together. Those of us in the blogging world came up together in our twenties and our thirties, excitedly, anxiously marking those days and years and all of a sudden we've stopped noting the birthdays:-) ...but nope, not this group, as you will see by the eagerness to share in a multitude of posts that will be addressing this mysterious topic of getting older.

And I say mysterious because it seems that our society and culture have almost exclusively been teaching us one view of aging, and that is one of decline not one of expansion, vibrancy and aliveness like no other.

When awareness meets with aliveness, you are unstoppable. And this meeting can only happen when you've been here for a *few-ish* years. How lucky we are. Those of us who get to experience this meeting place. Oh, I can't even begin to tell you the depth of appreciation I feel on most days. Do I still experience stress, worry and fear as I grow older, I do. Honestly more than I'd like to. But now I have more tools to recognize it sooner and sort it out quicker. This skill set alone gives me a sense of freedom that I never had in my 'younger' days.

I have felt more beautiful now than I ever have. I started dancing again last year so I feel in better shape physically than I ever have. I am more in my skin than ever before and on the days when I can really embrace this, the clarity I have from knowing myself so well is the best. It really, truly is an amazing time and I'm so thankful to be here @ 41.

So the reason I'm calling this post *born again* is because I literally feel like, in so many ways, my life is just beginning now. Like the first 40 years were just a test run (a pretty good test run, I will say). And now I get to take all that I have learned thus far and apply it to a life lived all over again. However many days ahead I have, I'll take them! If I get another 40, I'll be so lucky.

I am awake. I have been for a while. But now, I get it. Every day I'm here is a gift to live, I mean really LIVE.

Thank you to all the women (and men) who inspire me: those out ahead of me, who have shown me and continue to show me the way, especially my Mom who is a daily example that life at 75 can be even better still! and thank you to all of you coming up behind me who remind me that the ideals and characteristics of youth are here for me to embrace, always.

I am so ready to just to have a whole lot more fun. The world is still my oyster.

I have a beautiful life and I don't want to miss a minute of it.



marisa anne

Marisa Anne is an artist, designer and founder of Creative Thursday. A small intention to be more creative one day a week while working a 9 to 5 job, Creative Thursday is now a full time business that is home to Marisa's art, podcast, blog and book of the same name. Passionate about encouraging others to live a life they love, especially creatively, Marisa also teaches, speaks, and consults. Her art sells worldwide and can be found in her own online boutique as well as select galleries and shops including Urban Outfitters, Land of Nod and Papyrus. In 2011, Marisa launched her first fabric line, and has just completed her 8th collection for Andover Fabrics. In 2012 her first book was published: Creative Thursday - Everyday Inspiration to Grow Your Creative Practice. Visit her at CreativeThursday.com

AGING WITH GRACE - AGE IS A STATE OF MIND

Sherold Barr



My Nana, my mother's mother, lived to be 101 and resided at home, alone, until six months before she died. A tiny woman (just over four feet tall), she was also feisty, and as she aged, she took more risks. She married Ed when she was 70 and he was 65. For 29 years they enjoyed a big, full, happy life.

If you knew my Nana, you would know that for her, life is to be lived as one big adventure. Nana started a senior citizen's band and they entertained at nursing homes. She bowled, and with Ed, was the four-time putt-putt champion at the senior center. She only gave it up at age 95 because she felt her balance was a bit off for bowling.

Nana always laughed and said, "I don't like to hang out with old people. All they do is talk about their aches and pains." I loved to tell her I wanted to be just like her when I grew up. It took me a while to get this; I was in my late 40s when I began saying this to her.

I consider myself blessed to have had such a positive role model for aging with grace. Nana showed me how to live a big life, take risks and go on adventures.

In my work as a coach and two-time entrepreneur, I have a keen interest in online marketing and the trends in business. This tends to put me in contact with young women half my age. I notice that most of my online friends are in their 30s, 40s, and 50s – younger than I am. At first, I felt awkward about it and questioned myself: what is it that attracts me to these younger women? I realized I am drawn to their energy and their keen desire to learn about themselves.

Now I feel gratitude and pride to be invited to soirees with 30, and 40-year-olds where I am the oldest of the group. I am honored to be one of the elders of Marie Forleo's B School where I have made incredible friends online who "get my work" and understand the world in which I live. Last week, I received a hand-written note from one of the women I work with and under my name was the title: "Tribal Matriarch." I loved that. I accept it

and wear it with pride.

All of us have challenges in our lives, some of us more than others. My 50s were the most challenging decade of my life, due to my younger brother's murder, and yet this decade held the most personal growth. I sought to understand what this tragedy taught me and what I could learn from it. In my quest to grieve and recover, I learned how to practice the art of self-inquiry called "The Work," which was developed by Byron Katie. "The Work" helped set me free from all the stories I had told myself since I was young that were simply not true. I had created a meaning from all the defining moments of my life. Questioning my long-held beliefs ultimately gave me freedom. I was humbled and learned selfcompassion and self-love.

I consider myself, in my 60s, to be the most authentic version of myself. I feel good in my skin. I have learned that my body is wise, and if I follow its energy and listen to its form of communication – physical sensations – I can trust it more than my ego.

I've survived tragedies and found resilience.

I am now courageous enough to share my vulnerabilities and imperfections, and employ my

personal growth tools to face whatever life brings me in terms of challenges. I no longer dwell on the tragedies of the past nor let fear direct my actions or my life. I love this quote by Byron Katie, "If you want to live in fear, get a future. If you want to live in regret, get a past."

In my work as a coach, I have seen twenty-somethings suffer with the belief that "they are too old," such as too old to get a particular job. It seems we can be too old at any age, in our own mind. If you become conscious of the story you tell yourself about how you are either too old or too young, consider instead that you are exactly where you are *supposed* to be. If you believe you are something other than where you are, you are arguing with reality, or "what is," as Byron Katie likes to say.

I am a fan of Jungian psychology and of <u>Joseph</u>
<u>Campbell</u>'s work. In his book, <u>The Hero With a</u>
<u>Thousand Faces</u>, the Hero's first encounter is with a crone, revered as a powerful and protective being. She offers the Hero help in the form of magic devices against the dangers he will face. In ancient cultures the crone was a female elder considered to be a wise woman. Yet sadly, in our present-day culture, "crone" is a derogatory term. I believe with the rising consciousness of the divine feminine we

will embrace the wisdom of the age. I aspire to be a crone.

I believe it's vitally important for all of us to find inspiration along our life's path, and especially as we age. There is no one right way to achieve this; I, for one, love finding inspiration instead of berating my body. My body is completely innocent. It's the mind – the ego – that attacks the body. I learned to be at peace with my body in my late 50s. I know now that I am an ageless Soul in a body having a human experience in this lifetime. I feel almost a decade younger than my biological age. Yes, my body now has more physical limits, but I am an active outdoor person and equally at home in the world of travel. I do know and accept that I must work out more to keep my weight down and to maintain my physical strength. My body is aging and that is something I can fight against (and lose) or learn to accept. I can accept that which I am able to do instead of focusing on the things I can't.

I want to experience a BIG life and have amazing adventures. I live my life so that when I am 90 and in my rocker on my front porch, I can say, "Wow, I had some amazing experiences, didn't I?

Here are the concepts I practice:

- Have no regrets. Make amends to those people
 I have hurt and ask for forgiveness.
- Live from a place of gratitude.
- Look for the positive in challenging situations or catalytic events. If you can't easily see it keep looking it is always there.
- Be as present as possible.
- Become conscious of what you think and believe.
- Happiness is an inside job. No person or material thing can make you happy.
- Notice what inspires you and gives you energy

 follow that.
- Notice what drains your body of energy and move away from it.
- · Follow what brings you happiness.
- Eliminate worn out things, worn out relationships, and simplify your life.

I know that my last true freedom in the world is being able to choose how I think about a circumstance such as aging. I choose to embrace it and I choose to do it with grace.

I am happier now than I have ever been. I know my Nana would be proud.



sherold barr

Sherold Barr wants to live in a world where women experience financial freedom and ease in their life and businesses. As a coach and mentor to women entrepreneurs, she has been a speaker at the World Domination Summit, featured on Kris Carr's Crazy Sexy Life, Roots of She, and A Year With Myself blogs. She is the founder of Smart Women Make Money, a program that helps women transform their relationship with money so that they can earn and manifest more money to support the life they want to live. Visit her at SheroldBarr.com.

GROWING OLDER = GETTING WISER = FREEING UP

Flora Bowley



When I received an invitation from Susannah to participate in a blog series about the AWESOMENESS of aging, I got full body goose bumps, aka "truth bumps."

How refreshing to focus on the positive aspects of aging, rather than replaying the same old, "how to hold onto your youth" conversation, over and over again. Finally, an opportunity to collectively celebrate all that is GOOD about getting older... and wiser. Leave it to Susannah to spark such a sorely needed dialogue in celebration of her 41st birthday. This woman is seriously on the pulse.

Like many of the inspiring women participating

in this conversation, I am turning the big 4-O this year. Although I've never been too caught up in the number game, forty does seem like a pretty big deal — a threshold of sorts. And, while it can be tempting to focus on the shocking amount of grey hair I have, my deepening "laugh lines" or my cranky-body-part-of-the-moment, it's honestly just not that interesting to me... anymore.

To give you the full story, I've spent an excruciating amount of time and energy worrying about what I look like and sound like and act like (you name it). For much of my teens, twenties and into my thirties, I battled massive insecurities that held me in unhealthy patterns. Although I knew on an intellectual level that the "gremlin" voices in my head were way out of control, they often ran the show.

However, as my life's work started to clarify, amplified with a few life-altering trips to Burning Man, stacks of self-help books and a heaps of soul searching, I slowly started caring less and less about what I looked like on the outside. My priorities started to shift towards *feeling* good, doing positive work in the world and surrounding myself with the people I love. This shift was so potent for me, I actually decided to change

my name to reflect the "new me." This is how committed I was to letting those old stories GO.

The moral of my story is: Growing older = getting wiser = freeing up.

Now, with each passing year, I'm aware of how much LESS I care about what other people think of me. At the same time, I've also grown more comfortable living in my skin, speaking my truth and owning my expertise and talent. As a result, I let my uniqueness shine brighter, I stand taller, I speak more clearly and I attract more and more amazing people into my sphere. Hallelujah.

Aging has also shed some serious light on the BIG LIFE questions such as: Who am I? What do I believe? What is my style? What foods make me feel good? What kind of partner is good for me? What am I going to be when I grow up? And the list goes on.

Although I'll always be a truth seeker and I still find myself stumbling along at times, on most days I find myself standing firmly on solid ground — belief system in tack and clear purpose leading me forward. I even found myself a NICE guy who makes me laugh, listens deeply, accepts everything

about me and shows up when he says he will. This, my friends, is a sign of the times.

I tell you what, it's amazing how much energy I've FREED UP by no longer worrying about things that don't actually matter or by spending time with people who do not feed my soul. Instead, I use my energy to create art, inspire others, spread love, manifest big dreams and tend to my body, mind and spirit. Did I mention travel the world, do cartwheels on the beach, volunteer in disaster zones and write books?

I'm grateful to say that my life feels more grounded, soulful, connected and FUN than ever before. This is not to say it's all smooth sailing from here, but the waters do feel pretty calm around here thanks to all the years of brave navigating that have brought me here.

Here's to celebrating life with each and every delicious year.



flora bowley

Flora Bowley is an internationally celebrated painter, teacher, author, and inspirationalist. Her vibrant paintings can be found in galleries, public spaces, on album covers and printed on unique licensed products sold worldwide. Flora combines twenty years of professional painting experience with her background as a yoga instructor, massage therapist and lifelong joy seeker to infuse her teaching and painting style with a deep and authentic connection to body, mind, and spirit. Approaching life and the creative process from a place of courage, intuition and transformation, Flora's inspired thousands of people to "let go, be bold and unfold" as they step bravely onto their creative paths. Her book, Brave Intuitive Painting, was published by Quarry Books in 2012, and has sold over 20,000 copies. Visit her at FloraBowley.com

BECAUSE OF GETTING OLDER. NOT IN SPITE OF IT.

Randi Buckley

The older I get the more I realize I am an anomaly. Now this isn't to toot my own horn and convince you how unique I am. This is a suggestion. And it could easily be titled "Thanks Mom!"

I've never had any issue with getting older and aging. I have never thought that women were like fruit, reaching a point of ripeness and then deteriorate. I have never feared a wrinkle.

Why would I take issue with evidence of my life?
With many smiles, squinted eyes in delight, or even the disconcerted looks from on my forehead.

I hear, way too often, so and so "Looks good for her age" or, "Can you believe she's a CEO"? And other commentary that gives a window into the fear others have of getting older. Come on! Why burden yourself with this comparison. One that serves no purpose and has no value. It doesn't have to exist.

We're not good at something or look good, in spite of our age, but because of it. What we are now is everything we've ever been up to this point. I can own that. I've earned that!

My mom, a great beauty, is often asked if she's my

sister. I grew up hearing people say to her, "I can't believe you're 30, (40, 50, 60)!" and so on. Her response was, "This is what 30, (40, 50, 60), looks like."

And it wasn't just with appearance, though that is what people are quick to comment about. Her interests, humor, care, love, passion, and to quote a friend, her "hotness", is because of who she is, right now.

When I worked in the spa industry, the "anti-aging" tidal wave was ever present. Isn't "anti-aging" death? If we're not not getting older, what exactly is happening?

Bodies change. They are ever changing. This doesn't mean they are not still beautiful. There has never been a hill that you suddenly start tumbling down in desperation having met the summit, the peak of who you are. Different is still beautiful. In fact, beautiful, is different.

It's not that beauty (in all its forms) is stunted, but the perception of beauty is. It's like not being able to see all of the colors of the rainbow. A fixation on just a few, and you're unable to see the beauty of each one. What I know from my mom, and the other amazing women I know, who walk ahead of me in time, is that the fire gets hotter. The view from here is that passions are explored more deeply, creativity abounds, confidence settles in, sensuality goes through the roof, everything that is important to you, gets rocked a little harder. I want to rock this out, like this, too. Just like my mom.

If you're still looking for a role model, someone who embodies this spirit, you'll find her. They (dare I say "we") are everywhere. If you haven't seen her yet, change your lens. Look for those doing incredible work, whether that is caring for others, creating art, running the show, etc...

Look for those who walk in the shoes of knowing themselves. Look for those who look like they are having the time of their lives... perhaps they are. When we see them, starting loving them.

Recognizing the beauty, in all its forms, that is here, makes it ok to see that in ourselves.

We don't just make peace with getting older; we make it something to look forward to. I do.

And when you look and see others, it will happen

one day you are looking in the mirror and see her looking back at you: <u>A Woman of a Rockin' Age</u>. Full, gorgeous, confident, alive, aging, sensuous, hungry for what life has to offer.

I'll see my mom. And that has been one of my greatest gifts.



randi buckley

Randi Buckley guides women toward gently uncovering the truth that is in them. Her clients are women who sense that their personal identity is in flux in unsettled situations and big life decisions. Randi's work points toward exploring one's own divinity, in support of forging a personal identity that merges head, heart, and intuition. She offers a support suite of self-study solutions, as well as personal coaching in an intimate one-on-one setting, including Maybe Baby and Healthy Boundaries for Kind People. Visit her at RandiBuckley.com.

MY FORTIES: IT'S A GOOD THING I LIKE CROWS

Pixie Campbell



I'm in denial that I'm in my forties. But the crows stomping around about my eyes are getting less deniable by the year. The last few years of ending marriage has taken it's toll, and I'm wearing the stress of it on this face. All kinds of fleshy bits are moving south, and I'm reminded that "gravity always wins" each time I spin my favorite Radiohead.

Aging is tough, and I don't know that I'm doing it very gracefully. Giving birth at 38 has kept me young in some ways and in others I'm just damn tired. So where is the gold, the wisdom in acknowledging this reality within the mortal coil? If I was oblivious in my twenties, and waking up in my thirties, my forties are akin to walking in the sunshine of mid-day. I can see with clarity I couldn't back then. My voice is strong, and I'm

not afraid to protect what's important to me, nor renegotiate terms in favor of freedom on all counts.

I'm a little spikier along the fence line, softer in my heart, flames taller in my soul, liquid-centered. Within me, flow. Beyond me, the second half, accompanied by an unflinching desire for creating new ways to raise hell, in order to see what needs a little whip cracking down there.

In my twenties, I listened to loud music, drove at speeds well over the legal limit, mixed it up with thrill-seekers, took uncalculated risks, and exceeded my expectations. It looked like getting lucky.

In my thirties, it meant a challenge to stand in the Light of myself and take a good look. Adjusting. Filling up. Loss. Letting go. Shine anyway. It looked ripe, as motherhood is apt to.

These days, the journey looks no less precarious: laying down my sword, while knowing exactly where it is and how to swing it, it means learning more about what's really going on out there, and taking appropriate action. It means no time for pussyfooting around. It feels like trusting deeply

that I belong, and having a responsibility to those who don't know they do yet.

The forties are a paradox. The luxury of innocence lies behind, and the wisdom to step up and be accountable lies ahead. The laughter has increased, thankfully, and so have my support systems. Though I'm two years in, I find myself lingering on the bridge, still curling my fingers around the young woman I was, asking again for her gifts and messages, for her brightness to emblazon across my chest.

Meanwhile, the crows are calling, and there's no way to go but forward. Good thing I have an appreciation for cacophonous sentinels who've made themselves right at home where my smile continues to widen.



pixie campbell

Pixie Campbell expresses her best qualities in the service of women and their children. She creates and mediates sacred space for spiritual healing, creative integration, soul reclamation, truthtelling, and abundant flow. Her mission is to shine her own light on the world's dark places. She wants to live in a world where women lift themselves back into their creative power, where the innocence and curiosity of children is protected, where mothers are supported, nurturing is a valued skill, and communities are grounded in circular, sustainable economies. Visit her at PixieCampbell.com.

39.5 YEARS OF LEARNING

Bella Cirovic



2014 is a significant year for me because I turn 40 in October. It's mind blowing that I'm here because it feels like just yesterday that I was walking down the halls of my high school, meeting my first (and only) love, cuddling my newborn baby, buying our first home... all of these milestones are flashing before my eyes. It was one foot in front of the other on my way here, and what a journey it has been.

I had preconceived ideas and assumptions about aging, but the years and experience getting here have put them to rest. Yes it's true that at my age I wake up with aches and pains, I strain muscles

I forgot existed, I text with one index finger, and I need reading glasses. Truth be told, you can remedy these things and accept them as a part of getting older.

What I wasn't expecting to feel at the tail end of 39 was:

Peace: I've learned to embrace and love my body exactly the way it is. Look, I would love to be a skinny girl, but I'm not. I've always been curvy and for years I've been saying that my weight has been a struggle. Saying it so often made it a truth for me. I decided to give up the "struggle". This is me, this is who I am, this is what I look like. My man wraps his arms around my belly, nestles into the nook between my neck and my ear whispering "I love you" and I think YES because I have learned to love me too. I couldn't fathom this kind of peace in my 20's and early 30's. I just let that story go and made room for love.

Sexy: What? When you leave your struggles behind and stop the self loathing, you open up a lot of space to think different thoughts about yourself. For me that meant being proactive and learning how to work with what I've got. I started taking better care of my skin with daily moisturizing from

head to toe. I tried following fashion trends but what served me best was going out to the stores and learning how to dress (adorn) my body. My confidence came to life like a dry sponge soaking up water, expanding into fullness. It took years of trial, error, tears, and experience to get here.

Confidence: I'm over my shyness. Growing out of our old stories is a beautiful gift that comes with age. I'm curious by nature and being shy just wasn't working for me. I used to live by the words: when I. When I lose weight, when I make more money, when I have time, when I feel like it... That was me living a halfway life. My father always told me that we are all equals, no one is better than the other. He's never steered me in the wrong direction.

I can now hold a conversation while holding your gaze. I've learned to ask for what I need and allow myself to receive graciously. My life has become so much more luxurious than it's ever been and it's because I refuse to believe the bullshit stories I used to tell myself.

Truth: You know what I really believe today? That I am deserving and worthy. I believe that every footstep I've taken has got me here (thank you

feet, you're getting a pedicure this weekend) and that the wild unknown awaits. I believe that I'm beautiful, funny, intelligent, and sexy. I believe everyday is an opportunity to learn, so I tune in and feed my curiosity. I make mistakes and learn from them. Perfect is a word that doesn't exist in my dictionary. I believe that sex gets better with each year that passes and that every once in a while I should treat myself to a \$40 cucumber cosmo (or two).

I turn 40 in October and I have absolutely no expectations of what comes next but I am ready to begin.



bella cirovic

Bella Cirovic is a photographer and creative living enthusiast living in the suburbs just outside of NYC. She documents her daily life through photos and writing on her blog shetoldstories.com.

THE BRIGHT, BEAUTIFUL SIDE OF AGE

Tracey Clark

I remember turning 40 and feeling on top of the world. I felt wise and confident, beautiful and even ageless. So, this is what everyone that had turned 40 before me had talked about? "Life begins at 40" some would say, and I could feel it in my body and my mind. I was ready to begin another amazing chapter of my life.

But, now I'm 46 and I have to say, over the past few years I think I have been mourning the quick-fleeting agelessness I felt at 40. I figured I'd have most of my 40s to feel it. But, that hasn't been the case. Perhaps it's because the last few years have brought with them some challenges from personal struggles to body breakdowns to hormonal changes. I mean, at least 2 of the 3 of those do have something to do with my age but for some reason, I just wasn't anticipating them to happen to me. Not so sudden anyway. It's been an adjustment, to say the least.

When I got the invite from Susannah to share my thoughts and feelings about my age, and all the awesome things about it, I will admit I laughed out loud. But, it was the kind of laughter that comes from knowing that it was no accident that the invite came now, in the midst of my "adjustment" process. Thinking, reflecting, and writing about

all the awesome things that have come with age is exactly what I've needed to stop focusing on the negative things and start acknowledging and appreciating all the positive things. I recently read a quote that said something like, "Which side has the greener grass? The side you water." Well said.

And with that, I am choosing to get out my watering can. It's true, my age has brought with it so many wonderful gifts. Regardless some of my physical and even some mental complaints (damn you hormones!) I wouldn't change where I'm at for anything. I am more grounded and self-assured, and sure-footed than I've ever been. I've got a better outlook. I'm kinder to myself. I'm more resilient in almost every arena. I'm sure of who I am and what I believe. And perhaps where all of these things come to light for me—in the brightest and most beautiful ways—is through motherhood. As I have gotten older, so have my children and I now have two daughters—10 and 16—who I know are benefiting from me being a more experienced and balanced woman than I was when they were younger. I feel more confident in my guidance, more wise in my tutelage, and happier with myself, who I am and where I'm at than I was years ago. And the woman I am now makes the mother that I am now so much better for myself and my girls.

I can feel it deep down. And that is an amazing feeling.

Although I might still be adjusting to the older me in body, I can tell you true, that I'm feeling pretty awesome in heart and soul!



tracey clark

Tracey Clark is a photographer, author, creative collaborator, and mother of two delightful daughters. Founder of Shutter Sisters and co-founder of Our Collective, Tracey uses her photography as a practice to Elevate the Everyday and believes that perspective—and love—changes everything. Visit her at TraceyClark.com.

THE (delicious) TRUTH ABOUT GETTING OLDER

Susannah Conway

"Aging is not 'lost youth,' but a new stage of opportunity and strength. It's a different stage of life, and if you are going to pretend it's youth, you are going to miss it. You are going to miss the surprises, the possibilities, and the evolution that we are just beginning to know about because there are no role models, no guideposts, and no signs." ~ Betty Friedan

Turning thirty felt like a big deal, and it was — it was my first big age milestone. My first real taste of getting older and all that brings with it. Of course, forty smashed all of that to pieces, and I have no doubt that 50 will do the same to 40. But this is where I am. I have been alive for 41 years as of today, and I wanted to share what it's like to be here — the good stuff, because heaven knows I could share a week-long series of posts about the less good stuff.

The fact is, I love being older. I love this feeling of wholeness that's deepening with every new year. I feel rooted in who I am, and while I still get tossed around on hormonal tidal waves, at my core I know myself. I know what I'm capable of. I know my worth.

After 30+ years of feeling like a girl, my forties see me stepping into being a woman. I feel decidedly

womanly, and what a deliciously juicy feeling that is. The changes in my body and face are not particularly welcome (understatement) — would I like to erase 10 years off my face when I look in the mirror? Yes, some days I really would. But would I actually want to be 30 again? No way, no how, absolutely not. My forties are proving to be the making of me. I wouldn't give that up for anything.

I deeply appreciate knowing I can survive things. And it's not just because I experienced such a life changing bereavement in the way I did. I simply have more years behind me — I have proof that time does carry on. That heartbreaks will be survived. That bad memories will fade. That forgiveness can be found.

I love the empowerment I feel in this season of my life. I care less about what other people think of me and will walk down the street like I own it.

I'll also hide in my bedroom on the days I need to, but the beauty of getting older is not having to ask anyone's permission to do what you need. I don't know who that permission giver was, mind you, but these days that spectre has all but evaporated. I'm my own biggest cheerleader because after 41 years it finally hits you that no one else is going to do it for you. By looking out for me I show myself

love and kindness, and when I operate from that place I have so much more love and kindness for everyone else.

I've no doubt 41 might have looked and felt different had I had kids or a partner, but as I have neither I can only report back from the trenches as a single independent woman. I face the (un)certainty of being an older mother, and who knows what that adventure will bring. If it happens — and it's one of my most heartfelt wishes — I do know that I'll be a better mother now, at this point in my life, than I ever would have been in my twenties. Not that 20-somethings make bad mums, *obviously* — just that 20-something Susannah would have done.

So even though there are those rare days I'd give anything to have had my life turn out differently, 99.9% of the time I wouldn't change a thing. I'm loving being a woman in my 40s, so glad to no longer be that sweet insecure girl I once was, so grateful to have my health and my family, so ready to keep evolving and growing in this life that's all mine. And hell, if my 40s are this good, I think my 50s and beyond are going to fucking ROCK.



susannah conway

Susannah Conway is the author of This I Know:

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Co-author of Instant Love: How to Make Magic
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Susannah helps others reconnect to their true
selves, using creativity as the key to open the door.
You can read more about her shenanigans on her
blog at Susannah Conway.com.

AGING: COMING TO BE A WILD SOUL ALIVE IN AN EROTIC BODY

Julie Daley



I'm a bit older than Susannah. I've been here on this earth for 57 eventful years... and they have been EVENTFUL. But life is, is it not? Life is full of events we have no idea will take place before they happen. It's a mystery. The whole beautiful, frightening, glorious thing is a complete mystery.

I pondered what to write about since Susannah first asked. I realized I could write about how...

... grateful I am to be alive after my beloved husband died so young, never to walk his daughters down the aisle, and never to hold his grandchildren. I could because it is incredibly true for me. Each year as I turn a year older, the first thing that comes to mind is this – how grateful I am for another year.

... lovely it is to grow older, that beauty awaits at every turn. I could because it does. Growing older has helped me redefine beauty, because the traditional definition, glaringly short-sighted, would have us believe beauty makes a fast getaway as we age. It doesn't. Rather, I've found that the ageless heart begins to make itself known and speaks of beauty in an eternal tongue.

... we are each so damn lucky to be here, to be walking on this earth, to be given life, not only once at birth, but with every breath. I could because we are.

... our bodies age into luminescence, into a kind of translucency that begins to reveal our true nature: Light, wisdom, agelessness from behind the veil. I don't really know what it is about the aging process that brings translucency, but it does. I do know that I feel more revealed, more humbled, and less like I am pushing against and more like I am moving with. The body grows old and wrinkles. The skin thins, as does the hair, but the eyes glow and the silence within grows. There's less and less color and vibrancy on the outside – hair, skin, energy – yet more and more light on the inside and all around... if we let ourselves be revealed.

All of these are true. As I grow older, more and more each day I feel a sense of deep gratitude for this experience.

A full and rich sense of gratitude that I get to be here, to come to know the sacred by living in this female body, this beautiful, aging, wrinkling, joyful, erotic body.

This wild passionate sensual life is just that – erotic.

Sprouting. Leafing. Blooming. Fruiting. We are tender tiny shoots who are growing into wise old beings with full blooms and fully-globed fruitflesh hanging from every branch.

Yes, there are days when the joints hurt. Yes, the hair turns gray (and we can choose whether or not to let the gray show without having to feel like it's some moral dilemma). Yes, the closer we get to death the more we face our mortality. But none of these things have to take away from the opportunity we have to reclaim our erotic nature for the life-giving force that it is, to live life in the female body with passion and desire, with a fully blossomed sensuality and sexuality that opens to everything out of love.

We are erotic creatures, just like the rest of Nature. Every thing dies, but before life dies it is ALIVE without questioning what is happening to it. When we open to everything because the love within is SO alive and fragrant, we live the fullness of the seed from which we came.

THIS is the work we women, especially we who are so blessed, privileged, educated, and aware, get to, and must, do. As Anne Baring writes:

"Each woman who gives birth to herself and responds to what life is asking her to accomplish, contributes to the survival of our species and the diminishment of human suffering." I've found that while my mind has tried to figure out how I can 'help' the world, my body simply wants to love what it loves, and my soul longs to sing the song only she can sing. My body still loves what it loves, wrinkles and all.

As women, living our erotic, sexual, wild nature brings something back into the world that has long been missing. How could we women live our joy when we believed there was something deeply wrong, flawed, and perhaps even 'sinful' about our nature? What has it cost us as a species to forget that life itself is an erotic, joyful, sensual mystery?

Joy, eros, fragrance, passion bring forth life in ourselves and in the world. At the core of our female bodies is a deep seated love of pleasure. I've found when my body is joyful and knows pleasure, my creativity shoots out of me like sprouts out of the soil, reaching for the light, impulsed by the erotic goddess.

So what if not nearly as many find me 'attractive'? So what? It's damn freeing, I've found. Damn freeing to not try to be living up to that attractiveness scale. I can't possibly live up to it – not using that scale. But when I sense myself as a fully alive, sensual, sexual creature? I feel the attraction impulses firing within my own being, protons and neutrons held together by the strong force, neurons firing away.

How much more alive might you be? Might we be? Can we women be? May we give birth to our sacred, alive, erotic nature and live what life is asking of us.



julie daley

A dancer at heart, Julie Daley would love nothing more than to live her life and do her work from the dance floor. Twelve years in the practice of 5Rhythms has opened her to the joy and wildness that is at the heart of women's creativity. A writer, teacher, coach, and yes, dancer, Julie savors life playing with her wee grandchildren & serving the women and men who are called to work with her. Julie is happiest when she is breathing through her feet. Visit her at UnabashedlyFemale.com

$BECAUSE\ I\ AM \ OLD(ER)$

Ronna Detrick

I could talk about what I have learned these past 53 years, about how my body doesn't move or respond quite the way it used to, about how I sometimes don't recognize the face that stares back at me in the morning, about what it feels like to walk through the mall or thumb through a magazine or flip through channels surrounded by youth and its glorification, about often usually being the oldest person in the room, house, business, even social settings. None of this is what I really want to say. Here it is:

I've heard and felt it for the past few years: a sort-of distant drum beat to begin with, now, closer than my very heartbeat; a pulse, a whisper, a chorus, a chant – a nearly-visceral awareness that I am compelled, called, and required to say and give what I know - because I am old(er).

It's not about content – what I've studied, the expertise I've gained, the work I've done – though that matters. It's not about my unique experiences – places lived, relationships survived and lost, lessons learned – though those matter. It's not about my particular story – family of origin, personality, choices, preferences – though this matters, as well. It's about all of this and then some. And it's the "thensome" of which I really want to tell you; the ways in which each of these elements have impacted all that I know, believe, doubt, question, and trust.

I did some research for this post, looking online and in books I own for quotes, perspective, data on what I'm feeling and trying to say. Oddly, maybe profoundly, nothing showed up. And though I know it's out there, I closed the last book and every-single-extra tab on my laptop screen then moved my keyboard in front of me.

This is what it's about: not looking other places for the wisdom that's within; speaking what I know because it matters and needs to be heard; trusting that my thoughts must be articulated and shared. I am compelled, called, and required to step into the world with more strength, more perspective, more volume, more fierceness, more determination, just more, than ever before. I am compelled, called, and required to walk through my world as one who sees, who hears, who knows, and who offers all of this and then some to my daughters, my friends, my peers, my world.

I am compelled, called, and required to speak and give *me*, expressly because I am old(er).

I couldn't/wouldn't have seen, let alone said this ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. The credibility or authority (whether offered internally or externally) would not have been mine. But now it is. At 53 I can and must sit at my kitchen table or my laptop, stand on a soap-box or a mountain-top, and speak/give what I know. No holding back. No editing. No censoring.

Because what I know and who I am matters.

A part of me All of me wants to say, "Come. I have so much to tell you, so much to offer, so much to give." But it sounds arrogant, doesn't it? (The too-long-listened-to voices within still attempt to control and quiet.) And right now, in this very moment, I see myself reflected in the windows that front my desk: a woman in her 50s, questioning her right and ability to speak! I laugh, out loud. Mostly at myself, but also at any who would think me too much and ever dare to say so.

So consider yourself warned and wooed: I am waaaaaay too much! Which is exactly the way I like it, the way it should be, the way it is. Risky. Bold. Dangerous. Deal with it. Deal with me – or don't. But if you can, if you want, if you will, oh, how much I will give, how much I will offer, how much I will say, how much I will love. Because I can. Because I must. Because I'm old(er).

And at the end of this post, what I realize is this: Even the remotest feeling that as I age I should somehow quiet down, slip away, or fade into the background is a lie from the pit of hell. More, the endless attempts by the over-culture and media itself to convince me of such, is evil embodied. Here is what is true: the older I get, the louder, the more present, the more fiery and alive and passionate and impossible-to-ignore.

This is no small story – mine. I carry the lineage, the blood, the hope-and-strength of thousands of women before me and it is my right and responsibility to keep them alive, just as they keep me alive in every single way possible. I am the daughter of Eve, Hagar, Deborah, Jael, Mary, Mary Magdalene, the woman who wept, the women at the tomb, the countless others who have names we've never heard, tales we've neglected to tell, stories that thunder, lives that yet live. They will not be silent, nor will I. And this closer-than-my-heartbeat pulse, whisper, chorus, and chant is what keeps me alive; hardly old, rather, old(er), wis(er), strong(er) than ever before.

I've heard and felt it for the past few years: a sort-of distant drum beat to begin with, now, closer than my very heartbeat; a pulse, a whisper, a chorus, a chant – a nearly-visceral awareness that I am compelled, called, and required to say and give what I know.

Do you hear it? Do you feel it?

It resonates, reverberates, and shakes the rooftops (as do I). I am here. And oh, how much I have to tell you, to say, to give...because I am old(er).

May it be so.



ronna detrick

Ronna Detrick, M.Div. transforms women's sacred stories - the ancient ones and yours. A Spiritual Director (or "Evocator," as she likes to call herself) for more than 10 years, she invites deep, passionate, and rich conversation about things that matter: faith, hope, desire, and what it means to be a woman of voice, impact, and strength. She blogs. She offers products and courses. She provides free <u>Blessings</u>. She speaks, including a recent <u>TedX</u> talk. And she's ever-working on a book about Eve (and her lineage) in which she reimagines their stories in ways that invite us to do the same. Visit her at RonnaDetrick.com.

ON TRAVELING LIGHTER + DARING SOONER

Danielle Dowling

I want my past and present to flow through me like water + the future to come to me easily. Fluid yesterday and today. Fluid tomorrow.

There was a time when effortless flow and deep, rich breaths of acceptance were mythical creatures. Alluring, gorgeous, and totally unattainable. I can remember the sometimes fearful constriction of:

5 years old. 9. 14. 21. 28. and 30 years old.

There was obsessive attachment, relentless recapitulation of my past, endless brooding over the future and bottomless denial of the present moment. I thought I should be thinner.

Braver, smarter, wealthier. My hair should be less red, my parents could have given me more, 'this and that' shouldn't have happened, or should have. Why did no one bail me out of debt? Why wasn't my apartment bigger? Why was I in an apartment anyway and not a house? Where was my prince charming? When was my career going to finally come together?

And so on. And so on.

Yet, somewhere around the age of 31 there was shift. Cracks in the edifice of my psyche gave off small but significant rays of soulful light. *Ohhhhhh!*The battle is not on the outside. It's on the inside. A fresh stab of yearning emerged: Why such faith in fear, I questioned? Why be so mean to myself?

I wanted to carefully, closely **examine my own underpinnings**. How did I arrive at this place of merciless progress and perfection? It was as if an electrical current propelled me forward, fueling the fire to make peace with past + present disappointments and betrayals.

In the seven intervening years, I've learned that we don't always have the wisdom at the time we struggle. We worry. We lack faith in a higher order. Only later do our choices make sense to us. Only then can we begin to explain their emotional texture. Only in hindsight can we see our fears and worries were unwarranted, that insecurities and doubts were just illusions and that we should have taken a risk or dared something new sooner.

I've come to the conclusion that re-living pain, excessive worry about what "might happen" and punishing myself into shape – mentally as well as physically - isn't particularly useful to my happiness, growth or creative expression. Nope, not in the least. I've tried that, and quite frankly it stunts my growth as well as my joy. In short, it sucks.

Instead I'm betting on the fact that my fears ARE illusions and that taking a risk will run in my favor. And if it doesn't, I simply trust it wasn't meant to be and I let go. The years lived in my skin have taught me that I don't need to hold on to anything. So I don't. And ease and freedom meet me there.

I hold everything in my life in an open palm. I love it, nurture it + show gratitude for it. And then, just like that, it is gone. I refuse to 'white knuckle it', pin it down, tell him or her or "the moment" it must stay and explain itself to me. Undoubtedly, it would (and has) been ripped from my clutches and that is far, far worse than graciously letting the moment flow where it's intended.

So let go and dare sooner.

And the most delicious perk of all? Traveling lighter helps us shine even brighter.



danielle dowling

Dr. Danielle Dowling is a writer, blogger, life coach and business coach. She holds her doctorate in psychology and is an intuitive strategist who works with women leaders who are ready to stop compromising on the things that matter most — self-realization, soulful companionship and accessing innate power. Her goal is to motivate women to live inspiring lives; to help them experience a life better lived and to help women achieve their dreams whatever they may be. Visit her at Danielle-Dowling.com.

FOR SUSANNAH, WITH LOVE AND SQUALOR

Elizabeth Duvivier



This post could also be titled "13 ways of looking at getting old with apologies to Wallace Stevens," but that feels really ambitious to me and the the first thing you need to know about me and old age? I am all about doing as little as possible.

There. Your daily wisdom nugget for the day: do little and then? Do even less.

I am thinking another possible title could be, "for Susannah with truth and digressions." But I, uh -- you know, digress.

I am old - 51 this month.* And, I have been asked to share my thoughts, lessons, surprises or anything else relevant to the experience of aging. This means that this post is likely to veer wildly into the territory of advice. I know, annoying as hell.

Rest assured, I have very little control about this. It's what old people do. We are compelled. It is a force beyond our reason. Much like our need to hold the menu out at arm's length in order to read it.

If I were not here to get all reflective and share my personal belief that time is simply a figment of our imagination, I would be telling you about how Imbole brought her own ritual to my day yesterday with exactly no help from me, at all.

I did precisely nothing but be conscious of her day and stay open to when / how the magic would be revealed.

I share this with you (as I try to keep focused on the aging question) since this is a solid 180 degrees away from how my younger self might have planned the day. (Note the word "planned" -- an illusion of control was often central to my early life experience).

My friend Noelle and I both celebrate our birthdays at this time of the year. (She turned 51 on Thursday thus, she is far, far more aged -- days and days older than I am.) We have a tradition of

getting together for play, silliness, epic amounts of gorgeous food and immoderate quantities of red wine. There may also have been a box of French macaroons that was scarfed in a most unladylike fashion, but you will never find any proof of that.

This my friends, is one way to get old.

I do believe that our long-standing friendship may be due, in part, to a shared belief that rambling conversation + coffee + dogs + bed is an exquisite way to start the day.

As part of our slow, impromptu morning we decided to head to the beach for a walk -- without checking the forecast. Sure. Why not? Well, because we are old -- so very, very old -- we failed to account for the extraordinary fog that had rolled in and, more importantly, the fact that we were arriving at high tide. An exceptionally high, high tide, I must add.

What does this have to do with Imbolc? Well, I have gone to this very beach hundreds of times and never once experienced anything like this wild, mystical mist. It was like stepping into another world. And then? When we had finished our seaside stroll and went to head back to where we'd left the car?

Oh. Right. HIGH TIDE. The path was knee-deep in sea water.

February 2nd in New England, my friends. We are both in ski parkas, hats, gloves and um, you knowboots. Alas, not the kind of boots a younger person might think to wear given that they were going to the beach in the middle of winter during high tide.

Why no. We were rocking the short ankle boots
-- suede (Noelle) leather (me) -- that would be
thoroughly wrecked by a three hundred yard jaunt
through a knee-deep frigid tidepool. But here's
where it gets fun. Here's where I had a lovely
conversation with the goddess of Imbolc who had
arranged all of this for us.

We took off those boots. We pulled off our socks. We plunged into the icy water, barefoot and screaming the whole way. With every step, I brought to mind all I wanted to leave behind. I imagined this baptismal as a spiritual wash -- much like someone else might race across hot coals to burn off old karma and land on new ground -- and I knew this was my unplanned, most welcome Imbolc ceremonial cleansing.

Out with the winter, in with the Spring.

What has any of this got to do with the experience of aging? Everything.

- 1. No one can prepare you for what it will feel like to get old. Nobody. It's a deeply personal experience and will be entirely yours -- just like, you know, everything else in your life.
- How you are living your life right now is the very best indicator of how you will feel 10 or 20 years from now.
- 3. Because guess what? It's the same damn thing.
- 4. SURPRISE!
- 5. Do you seek to feel better, to enjoy more, to relax as much as possible right now?

Do you practice gratitude and forgiveness (most especially of yourself)? Do you nurture relationships with fun and silliness? If yes, chances are you will really love the whole aging thing because in my experience, it's like a rocket as it leaves the stratosphere, you just keep dropping off stuff you don't need as you enter wild, new realms.

I can tell you *hand to god* I am the happiest I have ever been in my entire life and it has exactly nothing to do with any goals I set, any objects I own -- it has everything to do with knowing who I am and what I love.

For me, it took a long time to get here -- for you? I hope you can "get old" right now in that smokin' hot bod of yours and enjoy this day and not spend any time thinking about the future. Just trust it's all gonna be better than you could even imagine.

If you have to embrace anything, be a MISTAKE MAKER! Yes. Own it. Scribble it on a t-shirt. That, and my absolute favorite litmus test for all questions in my life -- I use it for EVERYTHING, large and small:

:: if it's not a YES, it's a no ::

See? I told you this would end up in the advice column -- ick. Sorry about that.

* Do not even try to tell me 51 is the new 40 or some such sh*t. 51 is colossal, people. COLOSSAL. And I am ALL IN. Bring it!



elizabeth duvivier

Elizabeth Duvivier's newest creative project is an accounting of her unabashed love of living in Providence: ProvyLove.com. She is the founder/director Squam Art Workshops and is a rather dedicated disciple of the ancient art of daydreaming.

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT GETTING OLDER

Ali Edwards

- 1. The knowledge that I can do it. After surviving the life-upheaval of a divorce two years ago one of my biggest first-hand-learn-it-with-all-my-heart-even-if-I-didn't-want-to lessons was that people make it through things.

 That process, and the way in which life has continued on, has taught me so much about myself and the person I want to be and the person I am and the things I can do.
- 2. Along with the knowledge that I can do it myself comes the potentially even more powerful knowledge that I need other people and it's okay to ask for help. Someone sent me an awesome email recently sharing a bit of their own life experience of second chances and meeting someone who wanted to help carry their baggage as they ventured together through the next chapters in their lives. It came from a place of giving and love and encouragement to let go. This is an area I continue to work on, be open to, and practice.
- 3. The journey continues. It's far from over. There's so much life left to be lived. I think I used to think somewhere inside myself that I'd turn a certain age and have it all figured out. Ha. I embrace that life is a process and that there's

- something new for me to learn (and be amazed by) every single day. There are new ways of looking at things and opinions to be challenged and books to read and places to see and horizons to be expanded.
- 4. I so love that I can happily admit and much more easily accept that I don't know everything and I don't have to know everything.
- Saying "no" comes much easier than it did when I was younger and wanted to be everything to everyone.
- 6. The matching-up of physical and mental/emotional strength. Let me explain because I'm not really there yet but I see it as a major blessing and it's what I'm working towards. I have been an athlete in my life. I can vividly remember what it feels like to be in really good physical shape. For me this was in high school and early college as a competitive swimmer. Yet during that same time my mental/emotional health was all over the place (hello crazy life of leaving home for college and the new experience of freedom). There wasn't an alignment between the physical and mental/emotional. I believe in that possibility of alignment (and I acknowledge that

I will always be learning new things that impact my overall mental health) and I feel closer to it as I begin to place more importance on my physical health.

- 7. The softening. Of thoughts and emotions and behaviors. I hinted around a bit here and there about my struggles with making everything blank and white all the time (it's in my nature to follow the rules). I cry easier]. I admit when I'm wrong quicker. I like myself better with softer edges and am making room for more grey areas.
- 8. I feel *more alive* right now than I ever have before.
- 9. I'm owning my own story. Working on accepting all the parts of myself – the awesome and the not-so-awesome. Seeking to understand the pieces that feel hard and unhappy and the areas where I still have a hard time softening. I love that I know I don't need to be anyone I'm not.
- 10.I like that at this point in my life I can approach things with perspective. I've got some life experience under my belt. I've known great joy and intense sadness. My body has faced

skin cancer and had babies pulled from it and has jumped from cliffs into the water below and all those experiences make up the person I am right now. And I'm so happy to be able to continue to learn and make mistakes and seek opportunities to be fantastically awake on this experience called life.

There are definitely still moments when I look at myself in the mirror and wonder who that person is looking back at me. There are moments of supreme doubt and fear. There are moments when it's so much easier to just eat the whole bag of chips or climb back in bed or do both at the same time.

But man it's a pretty awesome adventure overall.

And there's more to come.



ali edwards

Ali Edwards' passion resides in that very special place where the stories and images of life intersect. Her work includes blogging, teaching, writing, photography, and memory keeping product design. Visit her at AliEdwards.com.

WHAT 41 YEARS HAVE TAUGHT ME

Marianne Elliott

Nearly two years ago I woke up on my 40th birthday in the tiny town of Chagcharan, in the mountains of Afghanistan and wrote:

"Yesterday was my 40th birthday. I woke up thinking of all the people who I've loved who didn't make it to 40. I was at once sad and deeply grateful to be alive. Is this what aging feels like?

A lot has changed about my life since I was last in Afghanistan and when I think about those changes, I realise we don't always get the choices we thought we were going to get. Or the choices we were raised to expect we would get. But we get other choices, choices that we might never have anticipated.

They are not easy. And not always what we thought we wanted. But those other choices are life. And I'll take as many more of them as I'm given." Today is my friend Susannah's birthday and with her usual grace and wisdom, she invited me and some of her other friends to mark the day by writing about what ageing means to us.

To me, above all else, ageing means I'm still here and for that, I'm grateful.

Ageing also means learning what my body knew all along, and this is what four decades in this body have taught me.

I am stronger than I realize. And more fragile than I like. I can endure pain with courage, and be reduced to tears by a virus. I carry my memories in my cells, and I am constantly being born anew. I hold tight to fear and resistance. I breathe deeply, and let go.

My legs will carry me farther than I think I can walk. My heart will keep beating even when it is broken. My feet will find the path. My hands will sooth a crying child. And write a story that will make you cry. And pour you a glass of wine, and brush your hair, and stroke your cheek, and hold your hand. I will chop wood. And carry water.

My 42 year old body understands the wisdom of rest, the beauty of stillness, the power of touch, the importance of dance. And that there is only this. Here. Now.

I am here. I am beautiful. I am powerful. I am brave. I am scared. I am alive. And I am grateful.



marianne elliott

Marianne Elliott is a student and teacher of courage. Trained as a human rights lawyer, she worked in Timor-Leste, New Zealand and the Gaza Strip before going to Afghanistan, where she served in the United Nations. In Afghanistan, she discovered stories were her secret weapon, and yoga was her medicine. When she's not on her yoga mat or at the keyboard, you'll find her introducing her nieces and nephews to the joys of political action, or reading feminist crime fiction. Her memoir, Zen Under Fire is in stores now. Visit her at Marianne-Elliott.com.

THE WISDOM OF MY SKIN

Tanya Geisler

I want to tell you that 41 has been the best year of my life. That I am happier now than I ever was at 24...or 16...or 31.

But I'm not sure that that is entirely true. I mean, I'm really and truly happy... I'm just not sure I can say I'm the happiest.i've.EVER.been.

I want to tell you that I've never looked better.

That when I look in the mirror, I only see character, not flaws. That my laugh lines only serve as reminders of joyful memories which beckon me to fill my days with even more laughter.

But I'm not sure that that is absolutely true either. I mean, I think I'm pretty good-looking. But "never better"?

I want to tell you that I am 100% confident in my wisdom. That these 41 years have afforded me the temerity to ONLY EVER speak my truth (which of course, always sounds eloquent and sage.)

Ummm. Working on it.

I want to tell you that I feel mastery. And an Empress-like serenity. Yup, you guessed it. I can't be certain that that's true either.

I'd say what's more true is that I often look around my life and wonder who's in charge. When did I become the one who makes the decisions and deals with taxes and plans vacations, and has cat litters to tend to and shoveling to be done and dinner parties to organize and stockings to stuff? When did I become the one to know how to divide hostas and understand the tricks to getting red wine out of white carpets? When did I become the parent in the parent-teacher interview? When did I become Ma'am?

I don't know. But here's what I CAN tell you.

By 41, the rug's been pulled out from under me often enough to have soared in the grace of groundlessness.

The suffering of my teens, 20s and 30s stemmed from my desire, my NEED for things to be a certain way. If I was on top, I needed to know I would STAY on top, like, FOREVER, before I could allow myself to revel in my status. If I wasn't on top, well, of course, I wasn't satisfied until I was certain that I COULD get on top...and then worry until the

permanence of that status was secured.

That's a metric shit ton of suffering. And worry lines.

My nine-year-old daughter was recently distraught as some of her friends were playing a game that she didn't enjoy. Try as she might, she just couldn't quite get there. So she played with other friends, tried to create new games, or read a book alone (if you just felt a catch in your chest as you read that, know that I felt it too, Love). And then she'd go back to trying their game. Still no dice. So over one tearful cuddle on the couch, I found myself saying what I hoped would sound comforting: nothing lasts forever.

Sure enough, within the next couple of days, her friends had grown tired of the game and were onto something else... a game my girl helped create and absolutely loved.

Much happier was that afternoon's cuddle on the couch, but when she turned from her hot chocolate to look me in the eyes, I could see the pain resting there as she said: "But nothing lasts forever, does it Mama?"

No, baby girl. No, it doesn't.

But we have this moment. So your job, my job, is to enjoy every ever-lovin' second of this everlovin' life.

So it's true that I can't say with unequivocal certainty that I've never been happier, or looked better, or been wiser or more masterful than I am right now, because the gift of 41 (so far) has been a lesson I've learned from my aging skin.

Release.

I don't recall first time I noticed that my skin had started to sag. It wasn't marked with great fanfare...it was just a moment of "huh...so THAT'S happening". Though I do remember wondering what had physiologically triggered it. I immersed myself in reading about collagen and hormones and phyto-somethings. It comes down to this: for 30-something years, my skin was fighting gravity, regenerating itself like a champ and keeping moist and hydrated with little support from me. Then one day, it just up and decided that this was a fools' game, this fighting gravity business, and just allowed itself to relax.

Which frankly, sounded rather sensible.

When I think about the joys that I AM experiencing in my life (and there are plenty), I can attribute it to all to the places I have stopped fighting and have started releasing:

The need for certainty.

The need to be defined by stories.

The need to be liked.

The need to be right.

Expectations (but not standards, never standards.)

Yes. Nothing lasts forever and we only have this moment. Truly yes.

So will you try this with me?

Release your need for certainty and watch as the worry lines yield to laugh lines.

Because when I am able to release, that's when I can see and appreciate the fullness and exquisiteness that is truly, honestly and certainly this sensual, creative, decisive, beautiful, confident age of 41.

I can only imagine what wonders await for me at 42, 43, and beyond. For now, I'll hang here, fighting less, releasing more. Worrying less, laughing more.



tanya geisler

Tanya Geisler – certified Life and Business Coach (CPCC, ACC), <u>TEDxWomen speaker</u>, and writer – teaches women how to step into their starring roles, own their authority, and overcome the Impostor Complex in their life, in their work, and in their life's work. Visit her at TanyaGeisler.com.

A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

Jo Hanlon-Moores



On balance I like getting old. It's something to do with the way that when you're young, you're an almost empty vessel holding nothing but potential and wonder. That's an amazing way to be and feel. Optimism is your default position and the world is your hamster. Life is all on the outside of you, waiting for you. That's seductive and positive and naturally we are drawn to it.

But the older you get, the more life has moved inside. You assimilate it, become it, embody it. It's more than just experience, it has actual substance. I know I feel more substantial - and not in a 'can't get into my old jeans' way. It's to do with gravitas

and gravity and all that stuff. You become more solid.

Just by living it seems, we manifest our selves. How wonderful is that? We create ourselves by taking in life and sculpting it.

Yesterday, coming from a day spent with dear friends, meeting new people and then returning home to my beloved family, I also thought about how much of what we are, what we build into ourselves, is connection and the love that brings. The more years you are here, the more connections you make. The more connections you make, the more love you stand to have in your life and once it's in your life you merge with it and make it part of your bones and your soul.

At 50, I really feel that now. As a young woman I had little experience of love and nurturing that wasn't Labrador-shaped, and I believe I inherited an inability to be comfortable around human affection and empathy that has blighted quite a few of my family. My mantra in my teens and twenties was,'I don't know how to do life'. But I learnt. And I practised. And I screwed up royally. But I was making connections and I got lucky. Eventually my practising paid off and I got actually

quite good at 'doing life'. I drew to myself souls - in human and non-human bodies - made of such love that nowadays I am just soaked in it.

I am heavy and full in the way of the West, the autumn and the harvesting time, and the days of appreciation for what we have been given as the fruit of our labour. And as I sit in the morning, with the simple things - a notebook, a candle, tea and two snoring dogs (very simple) - and think about what I have to be grateful for I have to say, I'm grateful for getting older.



jo hanlon-moores

The Firekeeper is a woman who nourishes the spiritual and physical lives of her loved ones, near and far. Who invites them to sit at the fire and share stories and wisdom. She is the sacred within the spirit of all women and the hearts of all men. All life is welcome at her hearth. All life is called. Jo Hanlon-Moores lives in the west of England on the edge of fields and woods where she walks with her family of two and four-footed loves, and the spirits who guide her. She believes in and practises communion with all life. She is a Firekeeper. Visit her at TheArtofWildness.com.

FORTY IS THE NEW FORTY

Andrea Jenkins



forty is not the new twenty. forty is not even the new thirty. forty is the new forty. because forty is forty. forty is good, forty is great, forty doesn't need to pretend to be anything it isn't.

I did not always feel this way. I mean, three years ago, I opened my arms to forty. or, said I was going to or something like that. I said I was ready, I said I wanted it. I said, bring it. but I didn't mean it, I didn't want it and I stood at the door of forty and stared, hopelessly. and that cool woman I thought for sure I would be, the one who'd embrace every wrinkle, every grey hair, every bit of sag and droop, the unashamed, unapologetic one who'd wear every imperfection like the aging champion she surely would be, that woman was nowhere to be found. truth be told, that woman was probably someone my twenty-something self

foolishly invented. and so I began to see myself in photographs and think, is that what I really look like? and then: omg am I actually that woman? who sees herself in photographs and says that?

but then vanity became the least of my worries because then things fell apart. my mom got sick and I watched her die. slowly, and some other things happened and I got tired. I blamed forty. if this is what being forty means, I want no part of it, I said. if entering my forties means things only get harder, that the hill before me tilts impossibly upward, no thank you. if it means I will care (more than I'd like to admit) about what kinds of clothes I should or should not wear or what shade of lipstick is age appropriate or where did that one wrinkle come from and why do I look so tired all the time when I'm not tired, not even one little bit, if this is what forty means, I don't want it. if it means wallowing in a tepid pool of nostalgia for years on end, then you can have it. but more importantly, if it means watching the people I love die then I DON'T WANT IT, OKAY, I DON'T WANT YOU, FORTY, I REJECT YOU.

as it turns out, it does not work this way. as you know, this is not possible. and when things finally quieted down, so did the crazy talk. I cannot tell

you when things changed for me. but they did. somewhere along the way, I softened. there was no lightbulb moment, no woo-woo life altering experience. I just gradually found myself in that place, that good place you sometimes hear people talk about, that place you've earned simply because you have lived. and you love the way you look but you don't love the way you look and somehow, those feelings now co-exist in a way you never knew they could before, you lose people you love and the heartbreak changes you so profoundly, you cannot help but see your time in the world with new eyes, you cannot help but live with just a little bit of a lump in your throat. thing is, this is what makes it so good, the fragile, teetering part, the knowing part, the part that finally acknowledges time is not infinite and you are not actually immortal, and when you see things with these eyes, the world around you changes, and when you see forty with these eyes, forty is beautiful. because you are alive and you know what that means, what that really, really means. you are both flawed and flawless, broken but completely intact, imperfectly perfect. you are in your own skin, your own Godgiven skin. finally, and it feels good, even if it is changing, it feels right.

which is when you realize forty is not the new twenty. forty is not the new thirty. forty is forty because calling it anything else would be wrong. borrowing from another decade would be an insult and pretending it's something it's not means you've missed the point entirely. forty is forty and what you know in your heart is that you wouldn't have it any other way.



andrea jenkins

Andrea Corrona Jenkins is one part photographer, one part writer, one part (modern) dancer, one part teacher and one hundred parts mama. Through hands-on workshops and lectures, she brings the magic of instant photography to kids and adults alike all over the globe- from Portland, Oregon to Paris, France. Andrea's work has been exhibited in New York and San Francisco and she's a core contributor for the ever-popular <u>UPPERCASE</u> <u>magazine</u>. You can find her most days over at her blog, Hula Seventy.

THIS IS ME

Liz Lamoreux



This is me. Standing tall in the midst of my 37th year. Me pausing in the middle of the day and creating space to notice, to say, "What do you need kid?"

And then standing and breathing and listening.

Here in my 37th year, I'm claiming this truth: I'm so damn glad to be here.

To be able to feel and hold and see the beauty and the shit that make up this gorgeous, crazy, sometimes really hard life. To be able to deeply know that I am whole in the midst of all that has come before this moment and all that is to come ahead of me. And that I will continue to be whole even on the days I don't feel like I am.

To be able to look at the wrinkles forming around my eyes and mouth, the grey roots that I keep forgetting to cover, the softness that holds me together and feel my shoulders relax as I settle into the beauty of all of it.

To be able to make mistakes and still choose love.

To be able to know the difference between speaking my truth and knowing my truth.

To be able to gently hold the vulnerable bits. The parts where I'm learning how to ask for help. The parts where I'm trying to open up to even more love. The parts where I'm admitting that I don't know. The parts where I'm listening more and softening judgement more and letting things just be when that is the right move.

This is me looking myself in the eyes with compassion.

This is me seeing beauty and wholeness and truth.

This is me softening and opening up even more to the love within me, that surrounds me.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.



liz lamoreux

Liz Lamoreux is an author and artist on a path to grant you permission to hold the beauty and the messiness each day and tell the truth about it. Most days you can find her writing, creating jewelry in her studio, taking breaks to watch reruns of MASH, or baking banana bread with her three-year-old daughter. Connect with her at LizLamoreux.com.

MY BIRTHDAY WISH

Liv Lane

We're still recovering from a jam-packed birthday celebration for my just-turned-11 year old. An epic slumber party, a family pizza party, cards and gifts and cake and singing "happy birthday" at the top of our lungs. And Ryder beamed through it all (well, except for the times he was weeping from being so tired after the epic slumber party).

This is the way birthdays should be, in my book. A chance to connect with people we love, who love us just for being born, and then do whatever feels like a joyful shout-out to this life we get to live.

But that ain't happening with most of my peers.

The older I get, the more I'm aware of so many women who barely want to acknowledge their birthdays. While scrolling through kind messages from Facebook friends, they're quietly feeling like another birthday is more of a life sentence than a life celebration. One step closer to their expiration date, one day closer to not achieving all they'd hoped.

I love the way kids can't wait to get older, thrilled to the brim by all the potential that comes with a new year. But for middle-aged women, all those candles on the cake are more likely to represent the running tally in their heads: grievances, failures, losses, set backs, wrinkles and the crushing pressure to make the most of the years they have left.

Research shows that, on average, <u>our happiness</u> <u>hits an all-time low</u> around age 50...and then slowly rises with each passing year. The happiest people on earth are 80 and older; they've had a chance to make peace with their choices, to look back and see the big picture, to accept rather than fight their aging bodies, and feel grateful for – rather than pressured by – the days they have left.

But I refuse to wait that long for happiness. Yes, I've made mistakes. Yes, I've suffered loss. Yes, I've cried me a river. Yes, I've been unkind to my body.

And YES – all of it made me who I am, provided wisdom for the path I'm paving, led me to deeper love and connection, made me all the more grateful for little joys. There are huge gifts in the wrinkles. I know there will be more, many more. But there will also be fireworks and delight and glorious growth.

And really good cake.

When I turn 40 this year, I intend to celebrate like

a kid: thrilled to the brim by the potential of what's ahead. And when I blow out all those candles that shine a light on where I've been and where I'm going, I'll make a wish for me and you: for the strength to choose happiness in the now, in the aging, in this life we get to live.

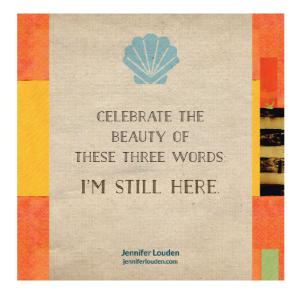


liv lane

Liv Lane calls herself a Human Sparkler, devoted to helping women define and ignite their inner sparks - the talents, passions and joyful purpose that light them up from the inside out. Liv left a successful communications career in 2007 to follow her heart, building her own business as an artist, intuitive adviser and inspiring speaker. She artfully and intuitively guides women to magnify their potential and clarify their purpose through her online classes, channeled guidance sessions, insightful blog and a line of life-affirming greeting cards. Liv lives in Minneapolis with her two young boys, husband Brad, crazy dog Daisy and an army of invisible angels. Visit her at LivLane.com.

THE BEST THING I KNOW ABOUT AGING

Jennifer Louden



I once knew a woman who talked to the dead. "They would give anything for one more touch," she told me, "one more hug." She mentioned angels want bodies, too.

That's the most salient benefit I know about aging – it teaches you gratitude. Pure animal gratitude. In the steamy-trenches-of-life savoring gratitude. It teaches you to celebrate the beauty of these three words: I'm still here.

In my 20's and 30's, even the first half of my 40's, I talked a good talk about being present and savoring life, but there is nothing like loss to teach you true. What I wouldn't give to hug my dad one more time, to hug Eric, my brilliant friend-brother lost to addiction, to sit around the Sunday dinner table with all those aunts and uncles and cousins – all gone but one. What I wouldn't give to feel my body paddling up a north-flowing river, pain free and so very, very able. So many pockets of life passed on. Such is the current that carries us.

And such is the gratitude – you are here, being carried. Breathing. Hugging your beloveds.

I've come to love aging because it has taught me such honest gratitude. In the contrast between what is and what won't be, I learn with a gasp: this, this. Now, now! I try to tell Lillian this truth, but I know it's mostly wasted. Not because she doesn't listen. But because what can never be touched again teaches you to touch now.

I lie next to Bob in bed and run my hand down his chest, feeling for that notch on his left rib, the small gap that makes him flinch when I press in on it.

He pulls away, thinking I do it to bug him. I do it to remember. Remember this, I think, remember this precious body, this body I love. Memorize it. I hug Lilly the same way, gasping inwardly at her Lillyness, the fruity scent of her shampoo, my gratitude

for her presence. Aidan towers over me and I still see him as I did the first time I met him. We were standing by my car, a hank of his lovely hair hanging in his face. Without thinking, I reached out and tucked it behind his ear.

This gratitude makes me drunk with life – gritty and pain-striped, blessed. It buoys me through all the repetitive conversations with mom, through rehabbing my back yet again, through the seventimes-a-day search for the reading glasses and my waist:

This, this. Now, now!



jennifer louden

Jen Louden is a personal growth pioneer who helped launch the self-care movement with her first book The Woman's Comfort Book. She's the author of 5 additional books on well-being and whole living, including The Life Organizer, that have inspired more than a million women in 9 languages. Jen has spoken around the world on self-care, written a national magazine column, and even sat on Oprah's couch talking about the power of retreats. She believes self-love + world-love = wholeness for all. Visit her at JenniferLouden.com for fab free goodies and upcoming retreat schedule.

SO, THERE'S MY NECK. A STORY OF GROWING UP

Hannah Marcotti



"I am thinking about the way that life can be so slippery; the way that a twelve-year-old girl looking into the mirror to count freckles reaches out toward herself and that reflection has turned into that of a woman on her wedding day, righting her veil. And how, when that bride blinks, she reopens her eyes to see a frazzled young mother trying to get lipstick on straight for the parent/teacher conference that starts in three minutes. And how after that young woman bends down to retrieve the wild-haired doll her daughter has left on the bathroom floor, she rises up to a forty-seven-year-old, looking into the mirror to count age spots." ~ Elizabeth Berg, What We Keep

I needed to talk about my neck I told them.

My neck. I didn't even want to start talking

because every time I heard the word neck I started to well up.

I am 39. It goes like this. I wake up every morning after struggling to sleep during the night. I wake up exhausted from the 2 or 3 hours I've been awake or the crazy dreams that won't let me go. I get out of bed, knowing the battles that are about to unfold for shirts and shoes to be put on and the struggle for space we all scramble for in our tiny life and the first thing my eyes see is my neck.

The weight I've held onto makes it a bit puffy. The lines across it are becoming more pronounced.

Some days I can let go of the gaze and move to look in my eyes or at my crazy messy hair. Some days I am able to put on my favorite shirt and sip coffee and think about things other than my neck.

But the days when I am unsure, the days where I worry, the days where I feel my growing up increasing and the beauty of my female self changing; those are the days my neck can haunt me.

Like all things female and sacred, the only way to come to peace with what I was feeling (and feeling shame for feeling) was to talk it out. Claiming the feeling of shame and fear dislodges the power that it all holds and ripples that energy in the form of trust back to ourselves.

So there's my neck.

When I turned 38 I found myself feeling as though I had opened up a window in time to go back to my 19 year old self and journey her through the years until she caught up with me, 20 years later, at 39.

We healed one another, this 19 year old and I. I carried wisdom and she carried hope. I carried deep love and she carried a wild edge. I carried a woman's body and she carried her youth. I carried the promise that it was going to be so beautiful and she carried her fear. I carried my sadness and longings and she carried the sweetest smile for all she met.

As we have integrated, this young one and I, here I am in a 39 year old body, in my physical world, fully loving where I am anchored. Fully in the fear of unknowns and the joy of all that is.

"The afternoon knows what the morning never suspected." ~ Robert Frost

I know her secrets and her longings. I have carried her into the afternoon of her unknown and now she is me. *And so I must talk about my neck*. Because seeing my neck, seeing my growing up brings me to a feeling that only can come after walking so many miles, so many years.

It is the feeling of being fully alive as me. This comes with the discomfort of neck lines, some extra weight and some sleepless exhaustion. Yes.

What happens as we grow up is an ability to stand fully in the discomfort and to see the beauty that holds it. I have never loved myself or my body more deeply than I do now. When I was young I would dream of having the space between my teeth filled. It wasn't out of a need to be perfect, it was an obsession I could hold onto so that I didn't have to fear never being loved. My neck? An obsession I can hold onto so I hide myself when the next stage of growing up is guiding me to find more honesty in my world.

"I finally know the difference between pleasing and loving, obeying and respecting. It has taken me so many years to be okay with being different, and with being this alive, this intense." ~ Eve Ensler, I am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around the World

My honesty is that I am so freaking alive it terrifies me and excites me, lights me up and exhausts me. I sat down last night with the man who has been walking this 20 year journey with me. Who has been growing up with me. I asked him about aging, growing older, growing up. I sipped wine, he sipped beer.

He said that now we no longer hold onto the sacredness of all we believed in when we were young. Nothing will be perfect. That beauty is the merging of the perfect and imperfect, not a weeding out of imperfection. And for him, being able to fully be himself in all situations was his next gift of learning. We are learning this together, in this 20 years of growing up. We look different. We move through space in new ways. Every day we choose what we truly desire.

I have such reverence for time. I celebrate things so tiny others might step past them. Every cup of coffee, every smile and kiss from my lover, every time the little ones laugh together it is time blessing me, kissing my path, guiding me deeper.

So this neck. And the spaces in between the mess all over the table and the deadlines and the fear where time has allowed me to close my eyes and record the wonder and the fullness of who I am.

That 19 year old had so much she wanted to say to me. She was floating messages until I heard. What she needed from me was space to grow up. She

always felt me guiding her into her tomorrows. There was a trust that one day the intense sensitivity would find a home.

The fear of feeling far more than anyone would want has now become her my knowing of what or who claims the sacredness of my love, my time, my nurture, my creativity, my work. What was a fear is now my gift of self.

Yes, there is my neck.

To keep rhythm and see time passing. To remind me to look in my eyes or another's and find the smile waiting just for me. To show me that days can be fucking hard and then fucking beautiful within seconds passing. To remind me that I am a female body holding this really big intense spirit. To give a little whisper each morning that I am growing up.

I imagine the 19 year old somewhere looking on, seeing me in my knowing of sexiness and confidence and tattoos and vulnerability and wondering how much more stunning a story this neck will tell in 20 more years.



hannah marcotti

Hannah Marcotti is a quietly impassioned motivator who serves as guide to your gorgeous life and business of the heart. She is living life in highly sensitive skin, finding ways to move through life in each new iteration of self and deeply believes that change is sexy. You'll find her circling women to help them celebrate life through story, soulwork and sometimes bourbon and bubbles. She is often found tattooing joy on the spirits of those in her community. Visit her at HannahMarcotti.com.

THE ART OF OLDER WOMANHOOD

Justine Musk

Not long after I turned 40, a female photographer I trusted and respected (Christa Meola) took some photos of me with a snake. I was wearing fringed high-heeled booties, black leather pants, some false eyelashes, and nothing else. After Susannah invited a group of us to blog about the positive side of growing older, I found myself thinking of those pictures, the Western mythology they evoke. Eve was a woman after experience and knowledge, and I could relate to that.

Eve had a rebellious streak, and I could relate to that too.

As I get older I feel my growing sense of space and authority, my determination to live — and love — on my own terms (thank you much). I think it's this way for a lot of women. Former Ms magazine editor <u>Suzanne Braun</u> <u>Levine</u> refers to the "fuck you 50s"; I would suggest they start earlier than that.

In her book INVENTING THE REST OF OUR LIVES, Levine writes: "The dynamic that many women are reporting – new outlook, new confidence, new dreams – is supported by scientific research from many disciplines. What we are learning about our bodies tells us that nature has by no means abandoned us at this stage...we are not programmed to fade away. On the contrary, we might be as well or better suited to new challenges at this stage of life than before."

The brain is "generating in ways that are supportive of big achievements after midlife". In the part of the brain

"responsible for making judgments, finding new solutions to old problems, and managing emotions – not sweating the small stuff – there is a great leap forward."

Maybe, when Eve ate the apple, she had just leaped forward herself.

2

You learn that you are tougher than you thought. There's so much more to you than you realize, or that they – whoever "they" are – might have led you to expect. You take pride in your grit and resiliency. You show off your battle scars. You are no longer the sweet young thing you were at 20 — too insecure to understand how desirable you were just because you were 20 — but that's okay. People look at you now because you have something to say. Your growing sense of personal power no longer requires the sexy black dress, the overpriced handbag (although they are still there for you to enjoy should you want them). You know who you are, and what your strengths are. You are damn good at what you do.

You are so much more interesting now.

3

As a symbol, the snake has an interesting history. The relationship between it and the feminine goes back to ancient times: snake symbolism has been found carved into pots, painted in caves and temples. Ancient artifacts contain images of women holding snakes, or wrapped in snakes, or sporting snakes for hair. There's the mysterious

Minoan Snake Goddess, who was also known as the Household Goddess, since the snake was a domestic symbol of protection (it ate the mice that got into the grain) as well as renewal.

Historically, serpents and snakes have been used to depict the creative life force. Hindu mythology stars a serpent goddess who sleeps at the base of your spine. Her full name is Kundalini Shakti, and she represents the divine feminine — the ability to energize, illuminate and create – that lies within us all. Snakes represent rebirth, transformation, and healing. The famous ouroboros – the snake with its tail in its mouth — is a symbol of immortality and constant renewal of life.

There are worse things.

4

We are complex human beings who leave a lot of ourselves in shadow, in the realm of what Robert A Johnson calls "the unlived life". Every door we have ever walked through, was another door closing. Every choice we made, was another choice that was no longer available to make. Every element of your personality you expressed...was another element that got repressed, packed off into shadow.

That shadow life never goes away. Sooner or later, it starts to knock on the doors of your soul. Hey? Remember me? That painting class you never took? That outdoorsy person you decided you were not? That path of spirituality that had no "relevance" for you? Well...guess what?

You can still surprise yourself.

5

In 1900, the average age an American woman could expect to reach was 48....assuming she didn't die in childbirth (roughly 6 to 9 of every 1000 women did). Now a woman aged 40 or 50 has a decent chance of living to 100. What a woman faces now is her Second Adulthood (as Levine terms it). Time to explore new possibilities, as well as a chance to loop back and pick up, in some form or other, what you might have missed the first time around.

Time to spread your wings — or develop a whole new set.

Levine refers to anthropologist Kristen Hawkes, who lived with a tribe called the Hadza in northern Tanzania and observed their daily routine. The men went off hunting, the mothers stayed behind and cared for many children. Perhaps too many. Hawkes identified the older women, the no-longer-fertile women, as "free radicals" who would go where they were needed – tribal troubleshooters. They could tend to the children who risked being neglected, and in this way help the community survive and thrive.

Levine points out that it is not the physical survival of the species that we are "called upon to tend to", but other kinds of tribal or global flourishing. She quotes psychologist James Hillman as saying that older women are "packed with memes. Memes are the cultural equivalent of genes." It's this wisdom gathered from our trip through First Adulthood that we can apply in our Second, whether it's choosing a new and ambitious set of problems to work on professionally or explore artistically, or transmitting to others what we've already learned.

6

As I step into my early forties, I have to say that life, despite its hiccups and inevitable low points, feels pretty awesome. I suppose at the back of my mind I thought that 40 would be like dropping off a cliff (into an ocean of fillers and Botox). But there's more intimacy and close friendship and general satisfaction in my life right now than when I was younger (and married). A lot of that has to do with me – what I have become capable of giving, what I have learned in my relationship with the world. First Adulthood wounded me in many ways – how could it not? – but the healing process involved an education that I wouldn't trade for anything.

I was exchanging emails with my friend Nilofer

Merchant, who just landed on the north side of 45. She wrote this:

"...But I'll tell you what I've learned after passing through that gateway of birthdayness: I'm glad for these wrinkles because it shows that I am alive. I'm glad for the curves left by baby and life because it also means i know a good lasagne recipe. And what bra to wear, and what jeans look best. I am glad for the years of experience that let me know when someone is lying, or when someone is worth backing. I know what I know and thus 46 is beautiful. I know more than I knew last year, and so to diminish the years would be saying I wanted to return some of these experiences, some of these things that

now make me completely me. I wouldn't turn in any of these years as if I could — like returning a sweater to Nordstrom. So instead I will relish ALL of it. And celebrate all of it. And go on from here. Because that's the real joy of 46. To go on, to keep going. To aim higher, to try again. It doesn't matter where you've come from or how hard the journey is... all that matters is where we end up. And for now what it means is I'm on the journey. So that's what 46 is."

There are worse things.

7

Maybe you're familiar with the story of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Persephone is kidnapped by Hades, lord of the underworld, and Demeter lets the whole world feel her fury (imagine how that would play out in contemporary media). Grieving, depressed, disguised as an ordinary old woman, Demeter takes a job as a nanny. And what a hell of a nanny she is: the sickly baby thrives in her care, grows robust and happy and handsome. Every night, Demeter holds him in the fire, to strengthen him and make him immortal. Finally, inevitably, the parents catch Demeter putting their child to flame, and - not understanding the goddess logic at work here — are less than impressed. Things do not go well. Demeter throws off her disguise and reveals her true self, in all her blinding, immortal beauty. She decides it's time to bounce (although she doesn't phrase it like that).

In her book SPINNING STRAW TO GOLD, Joan Gould notes the bare elements of this story – the old woman,

the child, the flames – and wonders if the raging, grieving Demeter didn't slowly evolve into another kind of character: the crazy psycho witch who lives alone (scorned, no doubt, by a man who traded her in) and wants to cook a boy in her oven so she can eat him.

It's time for new stories. Or maybe it's time to reclaim the old stories. To shuck off the dead skin, and see what new, vibrant life waits beneath. Scratch a so-called 'witch' and find a goddess. It will take courage, and imagination, and some fire in the soul. But I think we're well equipped for the job.



justine musk

Justine Musk turns into a jaguar at night. She is the author of three traditionally published dark-fantasy novels, a <u>TEDx speaker</u>, and blogs about the relationship between creativity, shadow, personal power, and sexuality. She believes that being uncooperative with bullshit is to be cooperative with your own audacious truth. Find her at JustineMusk.com.

WRITING THIS

POST ABOUT AGING

BEAUTIFULLY WAS

IMPORTANT TO ME SO

I FORGOT TO DO IT
AND WHY THAT

HAPPENED

Amy Oscar

This post was due last week as part of a blogging project launched by Susannah Conway, to celebrate her 41st birthday. I had plenty of time to write it. In fact, I started writing it the moment I received Susannah's invitation. I knew just what I wanted to say – and what I'd call it: Finally Becoming Beautiful.

Writing it would be easy – a welcome pause in the middle of the perfect storm of breakdown and breakthrough which had been constellating around me for months.

My soul had other plans for this blog post.

Like most everything else in my life right now, it would quickly become a lens through which I could examine the emerging patterns of the flow of power in my life – and whatever bright (or dark) truth is trying to resolve itself in me.

A truth that would turn out to be ALL about beauty and aging – but also vulnerability, shame, courage and love.

So anyway... Susannah's invitation arrived at the perfect moment.

I'd just signed the papers placing my father on 'Comfort Care' at the nursing home. Now, if he developed infection, cancer or any other illness, doctors would let things take their course, offering only palliative care, until he was gone. I'd signed the papers through tears,

with Dad's permission. Paralyzed from the neck down, he's finally ready to consider letting go. But each time I visit him, I can see that he's not letting go – he's terrified.

My mother is talking about dying, too. You're the only one I can talk with about this," she says. "Everyone else just poo-poos me. They tell me, 'You're just depressed." This 'everyone else' is my mother's best friend, who will be lost when my mother goes. She's a doctor, and she's been keeping Mom alive with a transfusion of her own energy for several years. Right now, though my weekly visits are 'for mom', I can see that they're offering her friend the chance to unplug from my mother's endless need. In this way, i do what I can.

To help me through this time, I'd returned to acupuncture and to yoga class. I also began exploring, with a shaman and a psychotherapist, the truth about what it was like to grow up as the eldest daughter of a mother with multiple personality disorder and a father with cerebral palsy.

When I saw the invitation for Brene Brown's Life Class: The Gifts of Imperfection it looked like a light-filled, heart-opening fun fest. Then, Brene asked us to pull out the boxes of old photographs.

I don't like looking at photographs of myself. In fact, whenever a friend would post a photo of me on Facebook, I'd cringe. No matter how dazzling the smile or how brilliant the composition, all I saw were the flaws – my flaws: Ugh.Why didn't I put on some makeup? Look at the

circles under my eyes, the bumpy nose, the silly haircut. Why can't I get it together?

I had no idea I was saying these things to myself.

They flowed through my mind unattended, a polluted underground stream. The cringe was habitual – it arrived before the camera shutter was snapped and after I saw the results. I just never look good in photos, I'd sigh.

Now and then, someone would catch me off guard and snap an image that offered a glimmer of how I could look, how I might look if I were really beautiful.

For a while, I tried to figure out the strange magic of how to pose – studying the way a model (or a pretty friend) was holding her body in a photo (leaning in), how she'd positioned their head (slightly cocked, chin up), how she smiled (big and toothy). My sister, Jenny, taught me at one of our Thanksgiving gatherings, to grin as widely as possible and look straight into the camera. That helped but not much.



I was 35(ish) when, while looking through a family album, I came across a series of photographs my husband and I had commissioned as an anniversary gift to ourselves.

The photographer was a dear and trusted friend. We'd loosened up a bit with wine. Plus, I'd just found out I was pregnant – a fact so joy-bursting that it made my skin glow from the inside. Yet, somehow, even then, the photo shoot was awkward and difficult.

Ugh, I slammed the book closed. I hate those photos.

Any other day, this would have sent me straight to the kitchen. Whipped cream and chocolate mousse. Potato chips and a glass of red wine. These things helped me feel better. But for some reason, I did something different: *I reopened the cover of the photo album and looked again*.

(I know it may not seem that way but this was a fierce act of courage.)

Wow! I realized. This is a lovely photo. My husband is looking at me with such love and playfulness. And you know what... I used to be kind of ... beautiful. How did I miss that?

And then: This is becoming obsessive. It's self-absorbed and shallow – and completely un-spiritual. But of course, you wouldn't know that – you never went to church and you don't follow through and you haven't got a masters in comparative religion and ...

What the ...?

This new litany of self-criticism stopped me cold. I didn't believe any of it – and yet, it had me upset and agitated.

No one – no parent or teacher had ever spoken to me that way. Where was this voice coming from?

I began to argue with it. That's not nice, I told myself. But then, wait a minute! I suddenly realized: There's a voice in my head – a voice that another part of me can argue with!

The next moment: You'll never figure this out. And anyway, who cares? This is stupid. Clearly this voice didn't like being looked at. But for the first time in my life, I kept looking. I wasn't afraid of the voice – I was amazed by it.

While I was looking, I noticed a few things about thee voice. First, I was certain this voice wasn't me – and it wasn't an angel or demon or the voice of God. Somehow, I just knew it was a part of me, a part that was starving for attention – my attention.

It would be dishonest to say that all of this awareness arrived at once. It would take years for me to really get to know the particular energetic signature that was this voice. But I did get to know it – and when I did, when I turned my attention toward it, it began to teach me.

It showed me that this aspect of the MIND is terrified of silence – that's why it talks so much. It's afraid that in silence, there is 'nothing', a great emptiness into

which I could fall, undefended, unprotected into eternal separation. Which is pretty terrifying, if it were true.

It also taught me that it's not true. It led me to the secret rooms where it had stored all my old hurts:

- "Your feet are deformed you'll never be a ballerina."
- "You're not pretty enough to get that boy (a football player) to like you."
- "You're not popular enough to make the kick squad."

And the deeper hurts, on which these things were standing.

- "There's something wrong with your father and you look just like him. Therefore, you are bent and "
- "There's something wrong with your mother and you sound just like her."

Together, we brought these things to light and looked at them again. We walked right up to these terrifying edges, hand in hand, and discovered the real truth.

Though my scared inner voice had fiercely shielded me from these devastating 'truths', it had also separated me from the empowering truth of who I really was.

So, sure, my father's face twisted, his hands shook, and his body was bent. But when I rejected what was imperfect about my father (in myself) I held myself apart from the gifts he'd given me: his wisdom and insight, his sense of humor and his never give up hope attitude.

Sure, my mother was shy – and she stuttered. Sure, she wrestled with the demons of her own mind. But by rejecting what was imperfect in my mother (in myself) I'd lost touch with the gifts she'd given me: a photographic memory, the gift of imagery and artistic talent that had made her a poet and painter, her lightheartedness and her radiant beauty.

I was working with all of this when Brene Brown asked us to find two photos of ourselves and whisper supportive things to them. I chose these photos and I was composing my whispers when I heard the ping of my email inbox, Susannah's invitation had arrived.

.... Funny how that happens. Funny how the soul arranges these constellations of awakening. Funny how, as soul questions arise and open around you, they open holographically, touching every part of your life.

I picked up my pen, thinking: I know just what I'll write about: Finally becoming beautiful.

Then, in another act of fierce courage, I looked into the eyes of the woman I once was and I began whispering.



amy oscar

Amy Oscar is the author of <u>The Soul Caller Training</u>: an online class, a paradigm-changing experience. She offers one-on-one Soul Caller Sessions. Amy is the author of <u>Sea of Miracles</u>: an <u>invitation into the light</u> and the editor of Doreen Virtue's "My Guardian Angel" column in Woman's World magazine. Visit her at AmyOscar.com.

WE DON'T COME WITH A 'BEST BEFORE' DATE

Sas Petherick

My maternal grandmother died at 38, Mum when she was 53. And as anyone in the Motherless Daughters Club knows, 'death ages' become milestones to be passed with no small amount of relief.

The possibility of death winking at me around the corner has made me hyper-aware of time passing – since Mum's death one random Tuesday in 2002, I have been prone to jamming in as many experiences as possible. It has been a thrilling and stimulating and exhausting way to live.

And of course the time passed anyway, and suddenly here I am at 40.

I remember Mum at 40 – she was so *vibrant*. After leaving school at 14 to care for her own mother, she educated herself as an adult, finishing highschool in her late twenties and completing her degree in her mid-thirties. By 40 she was working as a psychiatric nurse and lecturing at the nursing college – her dream job, over two decades in the making. Mum's speciality was women with postnatal depression – she was a passionate advocate for those women lucky enough to have her stand for them. And as is the beautiful synchronicity of things, they in turn stood for her at her funeral.

They spoke of her wisdom and kindness, of how she walked into homes full of grief and turmoil like it was no big thing, and folded washing and made tea and collected everybody up so they could heal. They told us of the families she saved. Of the children that came after the black dog of depression had left them, when they felt strong enough to complete their tiny tribes. Someone dedicated her book to Mum, claiming she had saved her life.

Of course I knew nothing of this at the time. I was too busy being a teenager, wrapped up in my own world of school exams, first love heart-break, the possibility of the Cold War, escaping constant body-consciousness through the melancholic troubadours of the 80s folk scene. Everything was made of woe.

Mum was just *there*. She was safety and home. And she relied on wine to unwind, never had dessert, constantly worried about her stretch-marks, her wrinkles, her weight. Yet she was utterly oblivious to her beauty, to the impact she had on every room she walked into.

Its a tricky thing, to grow up feeling fatter and uglier than your own mother.

So I fell into a world of books and cultivated a healthy sense of humour. If I was not to be beautiful, then sod it, I would be pale and interesting.

It was the half a dozen years before she died that we properly connected. I had grown up some and Mum had healed herself in so many ways through her soul-sister friendships, meditation and yoga – she had experienced shaktipat and met her Guru. Through devotion and love she had lost much of her self-doubt and her tendency for self-deprecation.

She was a seeker, a healer. And she owned it.

As time passes I notice more and more of her with me, in me. I have softened so much over the last few years, allowing certainty and control to fall away and make room for mystery and curiosity. Through a three year long meditation practice, I have a direct line to the Everywhen. Having never been particularly 'good' at friendships with women, I have been found by my own soul-sisters who help me feel cherished and celebrated and accepted, and to realise that part of my mission on earth is to bring circles of women together.

I have realised that I am in my own way, also a seeker and a healer.

The process of ageing, is for me, one of finding more pieces of the massively complex jigsaw puzzle. It is a challenging, stimulating, love-filled adventure. And always in the back of my mind is the whisper of '53'.

To grow old would be an absolute privilege.



sas petherick

Sas Petherick is a Certified Coach and writer who coaches women just like you – smart, funny, gorgeous – to get clarity, uncover your awesome, unblock resisty thoughts, shift perspective and allow your dreams to unfold. She's been described as 'equal parts laughing buddha and fiery femme, salty sailor and foxy minx'. Find out how to amplify your life with curiosity and kindness at SasPetherick.com and check out Sas' new offering – the Let it Go Self-coaching Journey – it's the operating manual for releasing not-enoughness.

THE TRUTH ABOUT AGING

Jamie Ridler

I've been wrestling with aging. So when my friend Susannah invited me to join a wonderfully wise gathering of women celebrating aging, I longed to be a part of what I knew to be a much-needed conversation. The only problem was that when it comes to aging, I didn't feel much like celebrating!

Now, I am generally a glass half full, silver-lining kind of girl but aging has grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, shaken me fiercely and knocked the stuffing right out of me. For years.

Who am I if I look in the mirror and no longer recognize my face? What if I run out of time? What if I run out of steam before I run out of time? What if I never fully bloom? What if I become invisible, irrelevant, tired?

This struggle with aging enveloped me in doubt, fear and uncertainty, and I hated it. Making it worse was the fact that I was in conflict with one of the best allies we can ever have against doubt, fear and uncertainty: the truth. I am getting older. It happens to everyone, even age rebels like me. I became an age rebel because I so deeply resent being boxed in by a number (or anything else for that matter). We are deeper than our demographics. I want to be seen for *all that I am*.

And then it occurred to me. Perhaps age wants the same thing – to be seen for *all that she is*. She is more than my fears let in.

In opening up to seeing the whole truth about aging, I find there is much to celebrate.

I know who I am. I know my strengths, my soft spots, my eccentricities. I hope to grow throughout my life but I no longer feel the need to find, prove, justify, explain or adjust the truth of who I am. I am a good person. If people don't like me, that's okay. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with me or with them.

There are things I've figured out. I no longer have hordes of not-right clothes because I'm trying to find my style. I know my style. I know the basics I need in my fridge and in my desk. I know the four makeup essentials I don't want to do without. I know how I keep holidays and how I set boundaries. I don't feel the need to know, learn or be everything and I've got a clear idea of what I do want to know, learn and be.

I own my wisdom. I will be always be a learner but even from today's vantage point, I can look back on a lifetime steeped in the study of, love of and dedication to ideas, identity, self-expression and people. I am steeped with lessons gained from a rich variety life experiences and education, lessons that have had time to be tried and tested, to be discarded or taken deeper into my bones.

I am confident that I have something to offer – and I offer it. I have dared to share and experienced both the power of having a positive impact and the pain of failed attempts. I know that ego bruises, though painful, will heal and that the risk is worth it if I can be a force for good. I choose to show up.

All this knowing makes my life simpler and shinier.

More and more, I am enjoying the process of confidently refining my life so that it is vibrantly alive with what really matters and the rest is released with lightness ease.

Having the **clarity and confidence** to be myself and to align my life with the truth of who I am – pure and simple – is what I am celebrating at this age.



jamie ridler

Jamie Ridler is a creative living coach and the founder of Jamie Ridler Studios. From coaching to workshops, from podcasting to blogging, Jamie's work helps women find the confidence and courage to discover and express their creative selves so they can be the star they are. Visit her at OpenTheDoor.ca.

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL

Andrea Scher



This sign sits on the wall next to my bathroom mirror. It's the first thing I see when I get out of the shower in the morning and as I dry off I read those words: **You are beautiful**. Sometimes a voice in me says, "Ha! Yeah, right." Other times it makes me smile. *Some days*, I make a practice of trying it on. What if that were true? What about that feels true?

When I was 9 years old, I remember my gymnastics coach telling my mother that my legs were chunky and that I needed to lose weight. (I was a competitive gymnast and was as strong + athletic as can be)

I remember a close family member calling me thunder thighs, maybe once, maybe more? And I remember the warm wash of shame that flooded my cheeks and the immediate desire to hide my legs. Like, *forever*. (Which I mostly did)

I remember when my best friend in high school told me about something revolutionary she discovered - If you eat too much, just throw up! and it's like it never happened. Then she showed me exactly how to do it in the school bathroom stall. It made me feel relieved, like no matter what, there was an escape hatch. There was no mistake you couldn't undo.



I used to think that if I was just perfect enough, I could be worthy of love.

My body has changed since this photo was taken 15 years ago. My washboard tummy has been replaced by something much more smooshy and mama-like. There is an extra layer of flesh that never disappeared after boy #2 and I find myself sucking it in for photos. I even suck it in for myself in the mirror! (How funny to deny my new reality even to myself)

And then there are the disappearing boobs. The ones that were once perky little scoops (a term my friend and I affectionately coined upon discovering we were boob twins) and now are, well, slightly melted scoops.

But here's the irony.

Those words – you are beautiful – have never felt more true.

How is that even possible? How can I be feeling beautiful for the first time in my life?

At the beginning of last year I had a remarkable angel reading with Laurel Bleadon-Maffei. She shared a lot of wisdom with me, but the thing that stuck was when she said this: If you want something new to come through you, you have to stop looking back at what you've done in the past. If you could take the next 6 months as a kind of sabbatical, I would suggest that, although I know that might not feel realistic on this plane. But think of the next 6 months as such – Daydream. Walk in the woods. Sit at the beach. Allow the next thing to find you. What is it that you want to bring to the world? Let your higher self and your knowing speak to you.

For me, this was an entirely new approach to creativity. And it required a kind of trust I wasn't so sure about. Really? Walk in the woods for the next 6 months? Daydreaming sounded so *flaky*. The part of me that tends toward Type A felt threatened- everyone is going to get ahead of me! I'm going to fade into obscurity! I'm

not going to make any money! I'm going to WASTE. SO. MUCH. TIME.

But here's what I discovered. Walking in the woods allowed the words to come when I sat at my desk. Going to yoga class made space for great ideas to find me while I relaxed in <u>savasana at the end</u>. Having coffee with friends sparked inspiration + helped me shape my fledgling ideas. Having little adventures made space for delight, rejuvenation + fun stories to share.

There is a way that putting a little yin in my yang helped my creativity *find me*. I didn't have to pursue it so much as be awake + alive + ready to receive. It also made space for a deeper knowing to come through. It felt like a distinctly feminine approach to creativity.

Putting a little yin in my yang helped me to integrate my feminine. I learned to embrace my softer side. The part of me that wants to wear pink. The part that is willing to be vulnerable. The part of me that can hold things with so much more compassion.

It's compassion that has helped me embrace my imperfect, very human self. It's compassion that has turned me from feeling unlovable (broken, damaged goods) into something beautiful + cracked + holy.

Self-compassion (and the wisdom of age) has allowed me to see my own beauty. Not the perfect, magazine kind of beauty, but the real kind. The kind that stays with you a lifetime. The kind that is your essence. Your magic.



andrea scher

Andrea Scher is an artist, online workshop teacher + big believer in the transformative power of creativity. Through her e-courses <u>Superhero Photo</u> and <u>Mondo Beyondo</u>, Andrea inspires us all to live authentic, colorful and creative lives. Best known as the author of the award-winning blog <u>Superhero Journal</u>, she is passionate about the sweet spot where creativity and personal growth intersect. Andrea lives in Berkeley, CA with her husband and two sons. Visit her at SuperheroLife.com.

WHY I LOVE GETTING OLDER

Susan Tuttle

What does it mean to age gracefully? I was curious to see what would happen if I did a Google search on the subject, to take the pulse of this topic, if you will. I live in a small town in Maine, USA in a bit of a bubble in the woods, so maybe I am out of touch on certain subjects. I did find some helpful, positive content that focused on staying active and healthy, which was encouraging, especially in a culture so afraid of the natural physical aspects of aging. I'm tired of seeing visuals of celebrity faces sporting desperate attempts to hold onto youth in the form of a frozen, smooth face and overlyplumped-up lips and cheeks. It looks unnatural, and frankly, scary. I'll admit that I do care about my appearance, up to a point (and I'll admit, in the hopes of not sounding hypocritical, that I've had what I consider to be minor aesthetic procedures myself, like having the hyperpigmentation on my face treated and a varicose vein in my leg dissolved after childbirth), but I do think this whole concern over looking youthful as we age has morphed into a kind of manic obsession for some people, and it seems to be more pervasive in certain parts of the world. I'm certainly not immune to being affected by all of this negative 'noise,' but I am happy and relieved to live in a small rural town in Maine where it is considered normal to go out in public without makeup or

fancy clothes if you so choose; it's a place where people generally don't judge their neighbors based on physical appearance. Living in this kind of environment is going to be helpful as I age.

I think we would all benefit from turning off the "noise," as none of us are completely immune to it, I think, and if you are, please do share your wisdom. We need to be focusing more on who we are on the inside and what we have to offer the world (I know that sounds trite, but it's true), and defining/redefining for ourselves and others what it truly means to age with grace.

At its core, aging gracefully is really about *loving* being yourself.

I turned 42 this past Fall, and let's be honest, yes, there are things about getting older that just plain suck. In my age range hormones start to go whacky, making for all kinds of challenging emotional and physical changes, you notice aches and stiffness that weren't there before, the landscape of your body begins its transformation, silver strands appear in your hair. Wrinkles and sun spots become more pronounced, skin texture changes, all that fun stuff. It's not easy to witness these transformations in the mirror and it takes some time and doing to assimilate them. I recently came

across a quote via Pinterest on this very subject, by artist Kiki Smith. With wisdom she said:

"One's self is always shifting in relationship to beauty and you always have to be able to incorporate yourself or your new self into life. Like your skin starts hanging off your arms and stuff, and then you have to think, well that's really beautiful too. It just isn't beautiful in a way that I knew it was beautiful before."

I am starting to see something important as I begin this journey, when I look to my women friends in the 60+ crowd who are beautiful and thriving, and as I look inside and search/form my own thoughts on the process of aging. And what I am learning is BIG... ...that getting older is not all depressing, in fact, just the opposite. As my body begins to change, I feel something magical stirring within — something strong, a wisdom, a knowing. And it makes me feel, well, very sexy!

If this is going to be the trade-off, I'm in! And dare I say, I'm beginning to feel excitement about the process. Two big changes in me that are developing:

I say what I think and feel, speaking my mind with much more ease than ever before. This is so liberating! Of course I always try to be impeccable with my word as I do this (which I learned from the book The Four Agreements, by Don Miguel Ángel Ruiz many years ago), meaning, I always try to be sensitive to people's situations and careful not to speak words of judgement or hurt (unless of course I am treated poorly, and in that case my response will be in direct proportion to the treatment — sometimes that means not saying a word and walking away). In conversations I notice my thoughts often just roll off my tongue and I'm left thinking, "Wow, I can't believe I just said that." I surprise myself sometimes. And the liberating piece that goes along with uttering my thoughts with ease is this 'take it or leave it' attitude, which leads me to the next big thing I notice. I just don't care as much about what people think of me (and this feeling seems to be increasing as the days go by). What does it matter what someone else thinks? What matters is what I think of me and the way in which I conduct my life, treat myself, and treat others I love and care about. And what I notice about this attitude is that it works like a magnet. It attracts the type of people I wish to interact with and be close to and keeps away a lot of negative people and those negative, annoying interactions that can be so draining. It cuts out the bullshit. It forges authentic, genuine connections that make for a positive life.

I'm a big maker of lists, and I'm feeling the need to make some right now — a list of things I notice and

like about becoming a mature woman, a handful of favorite pertinent quotes, and a list of things I am committing to in order to age gracefully and better my chances for living a long, fulfilling life. Going for 100 baby!

Things I notice and things I like so far about becoming a more mature woman:

- I'm more selective with every aspect of my life with my time, work, activities, circle of friends, the food I choose to eat (healthy most of the time and delicious all of the time). My house is tidy, but usually a little dusty with cat hair balls flying around. I can't remember the last time I folded laundry our laundry room is like one big closet of baskets of clothes to pick from. It works for our family and we can just close the door to that room. The thing is, those chores will always be there, but the people I love my husband, kids, family, and close friends time with them is measured, so that's where I want to put my all.
- Although I love being with people, I equally love being alone with myself. Being a self-employed artist/photographer, author and instructor is big on this list because I love having the freedom to define what my work will look like. I also make room for 'me' time and I cherish this quiet, alone space. I like to read, nap, make things, talk to

myself and spirits I feel around me (no I'm not crazy), garden, go thrift shopping, dress up in costume and make my iPhone pieces, go on photo walks with my DSLR, explore the city of Portland, Maine, sit still and pay attention to my thoughts, exercise and do yoga.

- Listening to what other people have to say and asking questions about their lives becomes way more important and interesting than talking about myself.
- I am learning to say 'no' to requests that don't work for me, without having to give reasons as to why or why not.
- The impulse to pass judgement on others disappears. Passing judgement is usually about lacking confidence in oneself anyhow, and it's a total waste of time.
- Putting myself out there in terms of my work is no longer difficult. I've developed quite the thick skin over the years between being a professionally-trained flutist (getting grilled by professors, audition processes, and orchestra conductors), getting messages at a young age that I wasn't good enough, to receiving the occasional nasty feedback (I'm not referring to constructive criticism, which can be helpful)

over at Amazon on my published books that I've poured my entire being into. Once you've been picked apart like that, there's nothing left to pick at and you realize it all boils down to a choice. Do you choose to believe those naysayers or do you decide for yourself? It really is a choice.

- Eye tests with good results take on a whole new meaning when you're 40+!
- Women say the word 'sorry' way too much.
 "Sorry I'm in your way." is the one I tend to
 hear the most, and it's something I have to be
 mindful of not saying myself I think it becomes
 ingrained at a very young age. Let's only use the
 word 'sorry' when it actually makes sense to do
 so.
- We really do need a team of women to reinvent the mammogram machine. WTF!?
- I am grateful to all the positive role models
 that made and continue to make a difference
 in my life, especially when I was younger and
 impressionable, and now I want to be that for
 other people. Don't underestimate yourself —
 your words and/or actions can have a powerful
 impact on someone's life and may just be their
 saving grace.

- I've made mistakes and I'm going to make more. I will strive to have the grace to own them, apologize, and do better next time. It is especially important to me that my kids see this side of me, as my actions teach more strongly than anything wise I could ever say to them.
- I am proud to be a feminist and proud to be married to my husband who is also one.
- Sometimes I now hear myself asking, "Is this really me, or is it my hormones?"
- Has anyone else noticed how awesome sex gets at this age!?
- I love to dance and rotate my hips often.
- When it comes to applying makeup to a maturing face, less is best.
- Hats and sunscreen are a must.
- I notice that what makes an aging person beautiful has very little to do with the way she looks, and everything to do with the way in which she carries herself — the subtle movements unique to her, her stride, eye contact, an energy that reveals she is comfortable in her own skin, having a personal

style, an ability to reach out with her words and actions and touch in a way that shows she has not been defeated by life's disappointments. There is a twinkle in her eyes that is instantly recognizable, accompanied by an unabashed smile. I think I may have the startings of this twinkle and I am going to give my all to cultivating it.

- A good hairdresser is important. And I don't necessarily mean to imply you should cover up the silver, white and gray tones. They can be beautiful when you embrace them.
- I am becoming a huge fan of soft front lighting.
- I am truly beginning to understand what 'don't sweat the small stuff' really means.
- Stay curious. Learn new things. This year I am committing to learning how to speak French

 something I've been wanting to learn and eventually put into practice — perhaps on our second trip to Paris!
- The healing power of laughter is underestimated. Adults need to do more of it.
- Finding balance is all about deciding what my priorities are.

- · If you feel good, you look good.
- I love telling other people why I think they are beautiful.
- My creative work, my passion, gives me just what I need to feel good and whole inside. Living a creative life daily is one of the keys to aging gracefully I think.
- Embracing imperfection is way more beautiful, becoming, and satisfying than striving for perfection.

Yes I'm getting older, but in many ways my life is just beginning! I always want to be curious, learn new things, make discoveries, wonder, go on adventures, create! I never want to feel like I've reached all my goals. Otherwise what do I have left? There's always something more out there to help me grow into my Best Self. Always.



susan tuttle

Susan Tuttle is a photographer, iPhoneographer, author and instructor living in Maine, USA. Her iPhone photography has won many awards and has been exhibited in New York City, London and Paris. Susan was recently named Technical Advisor for Somerset Digital Studio magazine. Learn more about Susan and her work at SusanTuttlePhotography.com. Find her on Instagram at @susantuttle.

TOP 10 REASONS WHY YOUR 40S TOTALLY ROCK

Karen Walrond

This year, in July, I'm going to be forty-seven years old. Forty-seven. I have to admit, my mind sort of boggles at this. It's not because I'm worried about getting older -- I honestly don't give a flying Wallenda about that -- as much as it is that the number seems much older than it feels. I mean, forty-seven isn't "mid-forties," anymore. It's officially "late forties." It's damned near "knocking-on-fifty." And if memory serves, in the mind of my formerly-12-year-old self, those words used to mean "ancient."

That said, I was recently conversing with my friend Susannah. She was lamenting the fact that rarely does she ever read anything positive about being in your forties, especially for women. "The media keeps telling me I'm fast approaching my sell-by date," she groused. "Frankly, I just don't buy it."

Well, thank God for that. Because traditional media and my 12-year-old brain aside, experience has proven that 40's are amazing. Don't believe the hype, folks.

And so, in honour of Susannah's birthday; also, to simply put some media out there that establishes not only is there nothing wrong with being in your 40s, but rather it's actually *a freaking blessing*, here are: top 10 reasons why your 40s totally rock

1. You're old enough to be taken seriously.

Remember back in your 20s when you tried to make a point, and folks would just nod and smile, barely hiding their thoughts about how "cute" and "adorable" you were? That condescension is a thing of the past now, honey: you open your mouth, and people *listen*. In your 40s, you know a thing or two, by God, and people are willing to hear what you have to say.

- 2. You realize the "appropriate attire" rules may no longer apply to you. Just this week, I was laughing with someone about when I used to closely adhere to the Rules of Office Dress: in particular, the advice of one article I read in my 20s which had something to do with "wearing no more than 8 shiny things -- buttons included -- to work." ("Because they clashed with the giant shoulder pads?" asked my friend. She might quite possibly have been right.) When you're in your 40s, you don't have to worry about things like "appropriate heel height for the office" or "whether it's okay to wear white to a wedding if you're not the bride" -- you know what you feel comfortable in, and you wear whatever the hell that is. It's incredibly freeing.
- 3. You don't feel obligated to please everyone. It's not that you don't want to please *anyone* -- of course there are people in your life for whom it brings you great joy to please -- and certainly, you're mindful of manners and common courtesy. But you're not constantly on show, trying to make sure that you win the approval of everyone you come across. No, in your

40s, you've finally gotten comfortable in your own skin -- when you couple this confidence with a healthy dose of kindness, you realize you've finally become someone you really like. And anyone who doesn't approve of you can just move right on along.

- 4. Related: you know the number of people whose opinions about you matter -- and you know that it is a surprisingly small number, indeed.
- 5. Also related: you know how to say no. Gone are the days of saying yes because you're afraid of hurting someone's feelings, or you're afraid of their disapproval. In your 40s, you've figured out that the word "no" isn't inherently an insult; furthermore, saying "yes" when you don't mean it potentially is.
- 6. While you might have to lower your expectations, you've figured out that you never have to lower your standards. This is particularly true of relationships: back in the day, you used to have unrealistically high expectations of your friends and/or family; but now, in your 40s, you've figured out that eventually you have to cut people some slack. That said, you've also figured out this doesn't mean that you have to be treated poorly -- and you therefore you know when to decisively say "when" to disrespect or abuse of any kind.
- 7. You know when to watch your back and when to have someone else's back. And you know how

to do both (sometimes at the same time!) without compromising your own integrity.

- 8. You know how to have an amazing time. By the time you're in your 40s, you know exactly what counts as an amazing time -- whether you're a person who sincerely loves being in a crowd, or would really rather spend time in solitude or with a few friends or family -- and you know how to do it without apologizing. You know what kinds of activities feed your soul, and which ones sap your spirit, and you act accordingly.
- 9. You can try anything you want, because you're still young enough to do it, and you're old enough to do it wisely. Want to take up skydiving? Go for it. Want to get your pilot's license/go back to college/ learn a new skill? Knock yourself out. Want to, oh, I dunno, leave your law practice to do something that feeds you more creatively (ahem)? Get it, girl. Your 40s are an amazing time to try anything, because you have some life experience under your belt that will help guide you through.
- **10.** Laugh lines. Because there is no better evidence of having lived a joyful life, and in your 40s you've figured out that nothing is more beautiful, more attractive, more *sexy*, than *joy*.



karen walrond

Karen Walrond is a nationally-recognized author and photographer who inspires others to find and celebrate their own uniqueness, through the power of storytelling. For most of her adult life, Karen worked in corporate America, most recently as a lawyer, and before that, a structural engineer. Yet, her friendship with her Nikon camera began to blossom and, today, she is an award-winning blogger, photographer and author, who has spoken around the world appearing on CNN, TEDxHouston, and the Oprah Winfrey Show. Through her book The Beauty of Different, her blog Chookooloonks and her online courses and ebooks, she reminds us that even our uniqueness, skills and even our most mundane stories have the power to connect.

CLAIMING WISDOM

Chris Zydel



When I told my husband that I had gotten this invitation from my dear friend Susannah to write an article about the positive aspects of women and aging he said, only half jokingly:

"That's going to be a very short post."

He made that statement with love, based on witnessing me struggling with a whole multitude of body related issues that are the result of being IN a body for 61 years. Sometimes I feel like an old

car that keeps needing to be taken into the shop for repairs every time you turn around.

And dealing with those challenges has not been fun. It's been exhausting, expensive and time consuming. Not to mention depressing at times.

So sometimes I DO wonder if this whole getting older thing is all it's cracked up to be.

But recently I was listening to a class recording from one of my beloved astrology mentors, <u>Steven Forrest</u>, talking about the Second Saturn Return. For those of you who are NOT astrologers here's the short version of what that means.

Saturn is the planet that symbolizes maturity and being grounded. And it takes about 28-29 years to travel around our chart and end up in the same sign that it was when we were born. The first time that happens is when we are around 28 years old, and most folks who are involved in some kind of personal growth and self awareness process have heard about the first Saturn Return.

According to astrological timelines this is when you truly become a full fledged adult.

At this point in your life you are being asked to

make serious commitments to what has soul and meaning for you. Your task is to bring the lofty visions and fantastic dreams that often originate in your childhood into some form of reality. Saturn is also known the Lord Of Manifestation and if we get it right at the first go-round, we spend the next thirty years crafting and creating and bringing to life what resides as a yearning in our hearts.

At the end of that 30 years of crafting and creating and making manifest you end up at your Second Saturn Return at about age 58. Hopefully, by this point you have some kind of legacy. And a treasure trove of varied experience. This is when you have the opportunity to transition into the stage of becoming a crone, an elder, and hopefully a wise woman or man.

Something that I hear a LOT from my students when they come to one of my intuitive painting classes or workshops is a statement along the lines of "You are so GOOD at this!"

And I always come back to them with "Well, I do this ALL THE FUCKING TIME... so by now I BETTER be good at it. If I'm not, something is seriously wrong."

So one of the things that I have unapologetically claimed as part of being an elder is my mastery.

I can boldly state, without flinching or holding back that I AM a master at what I have spent the past 30 years developing. What feels so very good is that I don't think of this as ego or boasting or trying to pump myself up. This statement doesn't come from a place of feeling inadequate or like I'm trying to be better than another person. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

It's simply the truth.

Like Dizzy Gillespie, the jazz artist says: "It ain't bragging if you can do it."

And now that I'm a woman of a certain age I can say with confidence and self assurance that, yes I CAN do it. Often with effortless elegance and ease.

Along the same lines I have no trouble claiming myself as a wise woman. I remember when I was in my early 30's and had decided to go back to school and get a college degree. Most of the other students were barely in their 20's and would often comment on what they referred to as my wisdom. And I had a very difficult time owning that at the time. It didn't fit for how I perceived myself.

I wasn't yet anchored firmly to my deepest truth.

I was still too concerned with what other people

thought of me. Still seeking approval and feeling unsure of who I was and what I had to offer. Still identified with who I thought I was SUPPOSED to be. And become.

But now, almost 30 years later, with a ton of successes, failures, gorgeous gains and devastating losses, getting up and falling down... over and over again... heartbreaks and betrayals that I didn't think I would survive, a profound and joyful love that turned my life around in ways that I still can't comprehend, working my ass off to create something deeply meaningful to me and many other people and birthing it into the world, spiritual openings and ecstatic moments that transformed my view of everything forever... with all these things solidly under my belt, I can state pretty unequivocally that I am rich in wisdom.

Part of that wisdom is knowing that death is a necessary part of life. And that death takes many, many forms.

That courage only comes after you drop to your knees and stop running from the fear. And the only mistake you can make is to not do anything at all.

That there is no such thing as broken. There is only layers and levels of healing to be done.

That what I think of as my identity is much more fluid than I ever could have imagined. And being stripped of things I thought I could never live without is beyond devastatingly painful. But that creativity can save your ass every time.

I have learned that I am not in control of much of anything. That how my life turns out is not always up to me. And to surrender much more gracefully to the wishes of spirit.

I have learned that not everything can be fixed. And that sometimes all you can do with an impossible situation is cry... and hold it in your heart.

I have learned that love is something that I don't give or get, but is something that I AM. And that surrounding myself with the energy of those who also choose to live from love is the most incredibly self nurturing thing I can do.

I have learned that even in the midst of the most incredible suffering there is always something to hold onto. It could be a prayer. A loving hand. A memory. Or a chocolate chip cookie.

I have learned that trying doesn't get me anywhere and I can only be as good as I am. That the only person I need to forgive on a regular basis is me. I have learned that being a wise woman doesn't mean giving up the playful, fun loving inner child and that I may becoming older in my body but my spirit can always get younger and younger.

I've learned that you can never be too kind. To your friends and family, to strangers on the street, but especially to yourself.

I've learned that speaking my truth, saying no and setting boundaries, is the supreme act of self care.

I have learned that my heart is ALWAYS wiser than my head. And that my intuition always has my back.

I have learned that the only way to get to these truths and have them alive in my BONES is to live a long time. And that as much as I would love to have a body that could run and jump and sleep and be sexual without external aids and props and that didn't need so much attention just to keep it operating at a level I would consider darn pitiful even 10 years ago, I am grateful for who and where I am.

And if I had the choice to be physically young again but lose the wisdom and mastery I have gained over this long and incredibly miraculous life, I wouldn't change a thing.



chris zydel

Chris Zydel, also known as Wild Heart Queen, is head creative goddess at Creative Juices
Arts. She has over 30 years of experience as a compassionate creativity guide and an unshakeable faith in the power of creativity to heal hearts and change lives. She knows deep in her bones that everyone is deeply, wonderfully and gloriously creative and is on a relentlessly love-soaked mission to prove that to the world. Chris performs this magic by providing nurturing and joy-filled creative sanctuaries overflowing with encouragement, permission and trust in the sacred energy of play and creativity that lives inside of us all. Visit her at CreativeJuicesArts.com.