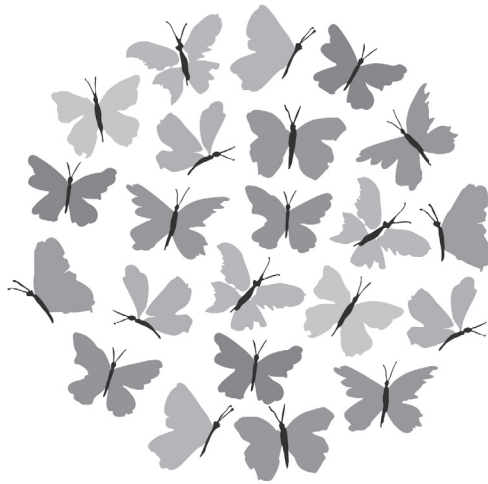


THIRTY-TWO ORDINARY WOMEN WITH EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

Women *of a* Certain Age

ANSWER SEVEN QUESTIONS



About Life, Love, and Loss

Joan Kennedy

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Preface

Life is either a grand adventure, or it's nothing!

HELEN KELLER



I am delighted to bring to light the personal stories of thirty-two women of a certain age.

To find women who had a story to tell, and would want to share their stories in this book, was quite a journey. It lasted more than a year. I had several women who wanted to write their story, but decided not to because they found it too difficult.

As the women started sending in their stories, I found them to be not only interesting, but varied, and some, surprising. They told about their encounters with loss, difficult times, and unimaginable experiences.

The qualities that helped these women to surmount their difficulties were perseverance, persistence, the ability to start over again, and making necessary changes that life called for.

I feel honored by the willingness of the women in this book who told their stories of what life demanded of them, and went beyond their self-doubts and fears.

From these inspiring stories you may realize no matter the difficult life experiences, there is always hope for the future.

Joan Kennedy

The Questions



Each contributing author was asked the following questions around which to build her story:

1. What experiences prepared you for this period in your life?
2. What was the biggest challenge you overcame?
3. Have your wants and desires changed over the last ten years?
4. What are your future plans?
5. What are you happy with right now?
6. How do you have fun?
7. Knowing what you know now, if you could go back to give yourself a piece of advice when you turned eighteen, what would you tell yourself?

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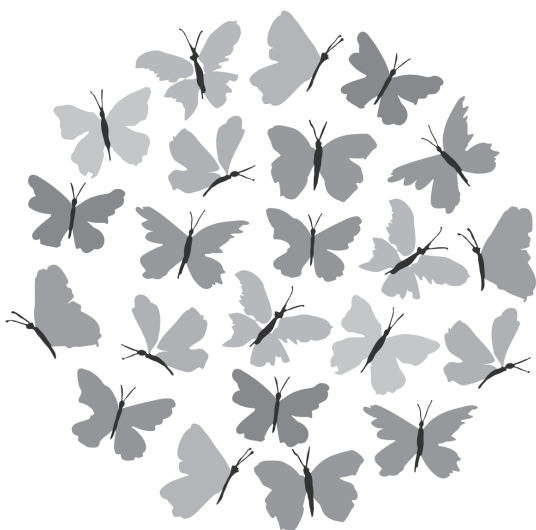
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In Our Twenties



Early Midlife Crisis

Nikki Abramson



Common knowledge is that we can anticipate a midlife crisis in our forties. I believe many people can also go through such a crisis in their twenties as well. You graduate from college and then boom—you are no longer living in a dorm. Instead, you are on your own, paying your bills and loans, and striving to figure out what you will actually do with your degree. In my case, I graduated and moved home to live with my parents, something many of my colleagues were doing at the time. I graduated in the great recession when no one was getting jobs.

Like many of my friends, I experienced this type of twenties crisis, but I had a second crisis that not as many twenty-somethings go through. I had a health crisis. Let me back up for a moment to one of the biggest challenges I have had to overcome.

In 2009, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from Bethel University, in St. Paul, Minnesota. I was a naive, excited, young woman ready to take on the world. My image of the future changed in August, 2010, when I was in a car accident. My car was totaled—the car I had gotten for my sixteenth birthday. At first I thought

I only had a minor headache and whiplash. A week later, my body was flung into full body muscle spasms that left me bedridden for seven months. It took several months for me to learn I was experiencing a devastating condition called dystonia. I lost my hope and dreams of teaching. I couldn't drive or work full-time. I was not only dealing with a medical condition that is still causing painful involuntary muscle spasms, but also one that drastically changed the course of my life.

The strength to deal with this new reality stems from growing up with other medical challenges and from being an adopted person of color. Having gone through adversity in the past, I already had the tools to overcome even the most challenging times ahead. My health challenges forced me to develop new skills and pushed me into a new career: motivational coaching and speaking.

Now that I am nearing thirty years old, I realize I have many things to be grateful for. I am happy with the relationships I have made since my accident and with my new career path. I appreciate the support I have received from family and friends. Happiness comes from being grateful for what I have, rather than focusing on what I don't have.

During my crisis, I thought about what I didn't have: I didn't have a career; I wasn't making much money; I wasn't able to drive; I wasn't able to keep up with my peers. Now I realize that happiness comes from deep within. I now view my twenties, in spite of the challenges, as being some of the best years.

For me, having fun comes with daily life. I love life. Because of this, every day I have fun. Because of my medical challenges, having fun is simply spending time with

others and it's an added bonus if food is involved. Going to Chanhassen Dinner Theatre, Guthrie Theater, and The Orpheum Theatre in Minneapolis are truly some of my favorite places to go during my "fun" time, especially doing it with people I love. I love theatre, and especially musical theatre. I also love playing board games and spending time in the sun. Traveling is a huge part of my life where I can also have fun. Because at this point in my life I am not tied down to anything (a relationship, a job, family, etc.), I have the flexibility and freedom to travel and visit friends in various parts of the country.

I was a senior in high school when I turned eighteen years old. As an eighteen-year-old, my focus and energy was spent on schoolwork, friends, and college. My eighteen-year-old self was scared, nervous, and worried about the future. I wanted to do well in school. I wanted to find a college that was a good fit for me. I worried about staying close to my high-school friends. I was filled with the "what ifs" in life.

If I could go back in time and give my eighteen-year-old self a piece of advice, I would tell myself to let go. There is a plan for you. Trust in the plan and go with the flow. It will work out. I would tell the eighteen-year-old Nikki to be in the moment, enjoy life, and be grateful for what you have. Each year presents itself with its own challenges, and we don't know what they will be. I would tell myself that wherever you go to school, whatever your ACT score was, whatever you major in, will not define you. It is our character and the person we become that is important. Finally, I would give myself the advice to create time and space for myself. During my school years, I tried to be the perfect student. I would tell myself to slow down and do things that were important to me.

Ten years ago, on graduating from high school and entering college, my wants and desires were to meet new friends, retain my high-school friends/teachers, and start a new chapter in life, focusing on a teaching career. My wants and desires were selfish. Now, my wants and desires are much more people-first. My goal is to change the world, one person at a time. I want to make an impact on the world through my teaching, speaking, and performances. I want to deepen relationships with family and friends and hopefully find “Mr. Right.” I would love to become financially stable and have an effective health support system. Whether those things occur or not, I want to continue giving myself time and grace when, due to health issues, I run into my limits. I look forward to what the future may hold, but I will also live in the moment with an attitude of gratitude.