

The Agony and the Ecstasy (ages 50 - 56)

Excerpt from book "LIFE" (pub. 2011) by clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller

Traditionally people become grandparents at this age. What do they do now? I'll tell you one of the things they do is come to therapy. Carl Jung once observed that more people enter therapy around the age of forty-nine than at any other age. My own clinical experience backs up this observation.

The reason people flock to therapy is that the early fifties is often a life and death battle. The battle is between Thanatos (death & destruction) and Eros (the life force). The way that people resolve or avoid this battle determines the rest of their days.

For people who had rotten childhoods this can be a renaissance time; a time to recapture their lives. If one's childhood was robbed by abuse or neglect, or adolescence was lost through early parenthood or your parent's death there are genuine opportunities here to heal or renew.

By fifty, one has reached the prime age for stable and consistent growth. What was on the horizon in the previous stage of life now steps onto the main stage. You will have to find a new way of being.

There is a test of courage on offer here. The courageous will have the impetus to take risks in life; the timid may briefly recapture the playfulness of earlier years before sinking back into the pedestrian mainstream. Fifty is really a good time to ask yourself "What do I want to be when I grow up?" (themes repeating from adolescence)

Rite of passage? Perhaps a time for reinvention of yourself. There are 8 steps to the process:

1. Realise that the changes that are needed are internal
2. Still yourself – the temptation is to remain busy
3. Go away for a weekend or a few days by yourself
4. Don't try to achieve anything during this time. Don't look for an outcome
5. Keep an eye out for coincidences and omens
6. Keep a journal of your thoughts and observations, even those that make no sense
7. When you come back, don't feel obliged to talk about it. A retreat is a work in progress, not an end in itself
8. After you return, try to find some time each day for silent reflection. Use gardens, libraries, parks and churches. Again try not to strive for an outcome. The result, if there is one, is self-awareness. Listen to your life

P.T.O.

AVOID

- Blaming others
- Discarding people – partners, friends
- If you experience depression, get it treated and use the treatment to move more powerfully into life

PREPARE FOR

- Expansion through creativity and love
- Holding life more lightly and reaching beyond your grasp

DO

- Practise self-reflection
- Change and deepen your sense of who you are
- Realise that you will have to invent new ways of doing things. Previous ways will no longer work.
- Become a great lover – of partners, family & friends
- Develop your sense of humour – make lemonade from lemons

Books for further reading:

Life – A guide. By **Andrew Fuller**, Clinical Psychologist Melbourne (above article is an excerpt)

Finding meaning in the second half of life. By **James Hollis Ph.D.** (Jungian psychoanalyst)

Twenty good summers. By **Martin Hawes**

Facing the Fifties – **Peter O'Connor**