

# Fabulous forties: Midlife clarity

"You've become so unfiltered lately," an acquaintance recently teased me. My initial reaction might have been to shrink, but then, perhaps unexpectedly, I found myself quietly celebrating. It seems that being "frank, open, and speaking my mind" now feels not just acceptable, but wonderfully liberating. Maybe, as my acquaintance suggested, it's becoming a new kind of strength.

For years, the big 4-0 carried whispers of impending challenges. Yet, for me, and for many incredible women I observe, it's a time when life truly begins to show its brighter side.

That infamous "midlife crisis"? It feels more like a profound "midlife awakening", a personal evolution much like the self-discovery explored in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The constant hum of external expectations seems to recede, creating space for what genuinely matters.

In this decade, we find ourselves gently shedding layers of what society once defined a woman should be, embracing Simone de Beauvoir's profound truth: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

As the visionary Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain urged, "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests."

In our forties, we're humbly finding our way to author our own unique stories.

## Little joys and big dreams

Amidst life's daily rhythm, a surprising inner peace often settles in. Joy can be found in small moments: a refreshing walk, comforting green tea, or simply gazing from my tiny balcony. This appreciation also extends to quietly conquering long-held, seemingly small desires.

I recall writing a note to myself at 18: "Learn to ride a bicycle after college." Fast forward 25 years – indeed, 25 years! – and that goal remained

untouched. So, at 43, I finally learned. It was a simple, yet profound experience, gently affirming that it's never too late to embrace joy, even in unexpected (and yes, sometimes wobbly!) ways.

This feels like "our" time to "spread our wings", to cautiously pursue aspirations, and to explore new territories. The world presents intriguing opportunities to consider. While we sometimes reflect on whether similar ambitions from a man might draw less subtle questioning – "Haven't you achieved enough already?!" – we're learning to quiet that external noise and listen to our own inner promptings.

It's a continuous act of self-definition, as Nancy Qualls-Corbett articulated, "The moment a woman dares to be herself, the moment she ceases to be a replication of another, is the moment she is truly alive."

And truly alive, we aspire to be.

## Our village!

Our inner circle in the forties? More than just friends, they are truly our "village", our supportive tribe. A group of kindred spirits and mentors who genuinely understand, who cheer us on, and who gently remind us that dreaming bigger now is perfectly natural. I make an effort to connect with at least one girlfriend daily – a valuable ritual to destress, debrief, and to ensure my experiences feel genuinely shared.

My mentors are invaluable voices of reason within this village. I recently chatted with one, a wonderfully unconventional activist, seeking her wisdom on life's complexities. I admitted feeling a bit "off" when sharing my narratives. Her simple, yet profound advice was quite clarifying:

"When you feel that way, think that you are the normal one and they are the aliens".

That truly shifted my perspective. Now, I find myself operating with that thought, and it brings a sense of lightness.

## Funding our future

The fabulous forties can also bring a powerful, often exhilarating, sense of financial freedom. It's a time when many of us feel empowered to make considered, strategic moves. Just before 30 June this year, for instance, I managed to create a savings scheme to secure an investment rebate.

A notable personal milestone? In my forties, I acquired my first piece of land. I didn't embark on this alone; I gently encouraged close friends to explore investing alongside me.

A stay-at-home mum friend secured her own land with funds from her spouse, recognising the value of her independent financial stake. Taking my son to show him the plot of land was a moment of deep satisfaction, helping him to understand that his financial security stems from both parents.

This experience even sparked deeper insights. I once mentioned to my son that if I were to have a daughter, I'd divide my property equally. When he responded, "That's how it should be", I was grateful to raise a son who took equality for granted. What if we could raise generations of boys and girls with a mindset to question the inherent inequities in traditional inheritance? Future policies might be informed by their evolving perspectives, letting

progressive thinking gently take precedence over existing practices.

## Embracing all of it, gently!

Our bodies, of course, have delightfully quirky ways of

keeping us on our toes. Hot flashes arrive unbidden, sometimes demanding *immediate* thermostat adjustments. We've been known to blast the car AC to arctic levels even when cool, only to still break into a sweat!

A brisk walk might lead to unexpected joint protests; our hair might be a tad thinner, lines between our brows subtly making themselves known. Yet, when we look in the mirror, those are mere delightful details. What we truly see are eyes bright with dreams, conviction, and an unwavering spirit.

When my girlfriends and I gather for Korean dinner, we are often amusingly "self-deprecating". We will share a laugh about our deepening laugh lines, thinning hair, sketchy memories, blurry eyesight, and even our wonderfully "dysfunctional hormones".

We discuss our gentle apprehension about becoming empty nesters, and grapple with profound losses – of parents, in-laws, even friends our age, to sudden heart attacks or accidents. It's heavy, but sharing makes the load feel a little lighter.

This collective conviction? It's a powerful, shared spark reflecting in the eyes of countless women navigating this vibrant chapter. While society might not always extend the same kindness, the compassion and understanding we show each other are boundless. An unspoken "I see you" communicates everything.

We feel seen, believed, and uplifted by each other with genuine grace. This chapter is about getting out of our comfort zones, pushing boundaries and cultivating dreams for ourselves, and for women who will follow, honouring the legacies of those who came before us. This is our time to expand our collective world.

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