

Boomer Angle™

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Second Adulthood: The Third Act

“Second Adulthood? I'm still waiting for my first one to kick in!”

My friend is witty but he was not quit getting the point. In reality he has done well in adulthood: a very responsible guy, long-term marriage, active hobbies, adult children and a successful professional.

Doesn't that cover the bases for adulthood? Maybe it used to but things ARE different today.

There has been a growing recognition since at least the 1990s that there is a new developmental phase of life, between roughly the ages of 50-80, which never existed before this time. It is being described by many names: Second Adulthood, Adulthood II, Encore Adulthood. It might be called “mid-late-life crises” on steroids.

The changing prospects and opportunities for older adulthood is not a new phenomenon. It has been evolving dramatically over the last 100 years. Social Security was one landmark event. It came into being in the 1930s and provided an unprecedented degree of financial stability for retired people at a time when 50% of senior citizens were living in poverty.

The 1970s ushered in another new concept: leisure and recreation as the ideal retirement. Socially isolated, age-exclusive senior retirement communities sprung up in Arizona, Florida and other places around the country focused on golf and the good life.

Since then the dizzying improvements in healthcare, wealth, nutrition and preventative care have continued to significantly increase life expectancies. The numbers of 90 year olds and 100 year olds are increasing dramatically.

Today there is a 50% likelihood that one spouse in a 65 year old couple will live till at least 92 (and this age keeps being revised upwards!).

We find ourselves in a totally unique situation that never existed before in human history! At some point after 55, the major tasks of adulthood have been mostly accomplished yet many of us still have significant energy, health and enthusiasms.

Children have been raised (mostly) and are on their own (hopefully). Careers have long since been established and may be at some stopping point. There may be some financial security. We have hard-earned knowledge of who we are and what has meaning for us. We are fully mature adults at the prime of our experience, skills, and capabilities.

Twenty years from now you will be
more disappointed by the things
you didn't do than by the ones you did do.
So throw off the bowlines.
Sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.
Explore - Dream - Discover.
- Mark Twain

Add to this two crucial pieces. We may have the vitality and vigor that someone 20 years younger would have had generations ago. And we live in the midst of the information tsunami offering access to endless worlds of ideas, opportunities and information. In this environment, the model of retirement as recreation and leisure alone may no longer be adequate for many of us.

This is the unprecedented opportunity of Second Adulthood. There are many ways in which people are using this gift.

Second Adulthood can be a chance to revisit passions which were set aside during the pressing needs of family and career: a returning to writing, musical training, crafts and other interests.

Life and Death.
This is the great issue.

Many people describe a strong desire to give back to the community as a volunteer or to teach and mentor, sharing their skills and talents.

Second Adulthood can be a time to go out by going inward. Spirituality in the second half of life is a tremendously exciting opportunity to explore the deeper currents of our being, free from the needs to prove ourselves, build up our ego and make something in the world. (Take a look at Richard Rohr's wonderful book Falling Upward)

There is also a common desire to contribute to a legacy: whatever one would like to leave behind in the world.

Finally, Second Adulthood can be a time for deeper learning and study, whether formally in college or on your own, a time to ask deeper and richer questions about what really matters and how one can help.

The promise of Second Adulthood varies for each of us depending on our life and our situation but many of us

will have the chance to explore the richly generative powers of this newly opening dimension of human life.

More Readings:

The Third Chapter by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

Prime Time by Marc Freedman

Composing a Further Life by Mary Catherine Bateson

What Should I Do With The Rest Of My Life by Bruce Frankel describes examples of what some people are doing in this new stage of life.

Mortgage Refinancing Update

If you are retired and want to refinance your mortgage at today's historically low rates you may have found yourself disqualified because you have no income from work even though you may have sizable retirement savings.

Recently announced revisions by Freddie Mac, the federal mortgage investment company may offer some relief. Freddie Mac announced they may allow IRA and 401(k) income to count towards qualifying income.

This very important development could open the door to refinancing and significantly lower mortgage payments for qualified retirees.

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