



Inventing the Rest of Our Lives: Women in Second Adulthood

Suzanne Braun Levine

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The first editor of Ms. magazine helps women address the three crucial questions of second adulthood: What matters? What works? What's next?

New brain research is proving it: Women at midlife really do start to see the world differently. Some 37 million women now entering their fifties and sixties—a unique generation—are refashioning their lives, with dramatic results. They have fulfilled all the prescribed roles—daughter, wife, mother, employee, but they're not ready to retire. They want to experience more. Suzanne Braun Levine gives us a fun, smart, and tremendously informative road map through the challenging and uncharted territory that lies ahead.

“Levine takes us beyond the frontier of our own expectations and into a new and hope-filled stage of life.”
—Gloria Steinem

“I found so many resonances with my own experiences in this book... It will have a huge impact and will clarify so many things for so many women.”—Carol Gilligan, Ph.D., author of *In a Different Voice* and *The Birth of Pleasure*

“Suzanne Braun Levine made me understand why I always envied older women . . . life just gets better—more outrageous, more radical, more passionate, less fraught, wiser, deeper, and kinder.”—Eve Ensler, creator of *The Vagina Monologues*

“A you-go-girl manual for the menopause crowd.”—People

Inventing the Rest of Our Lives: Women in Second Adulthood Details

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Author : Suzanne Braun Levine

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From Reader Review Inventing the Rest of Our Lives: Women in Second Adulthood for online ebook

Carol says

I really enjoyed this book and think I learned a few things from it. Many books about aging, retirement, the second or third chapter focus on mostly the economics and assume that most of the readers have been highly successful financially. This tends to focus on mostly professional women, but not entirely. Emphasis on possibilities and new attitudes are what I came away with. The author talks about what we give up as we age and also what we gain. If I can come away from reading a book with new insights and a positive attitude, I consider that book a winner. The reason I gave it 4 instead of 5 stars is, it was a little slow to get hooked in. I would recommend this book to women who are close to 50, women contemplating a life change, recently retired women (like me) looking for some guidance to find an answer to "What's next?".

Kiri says

I'm not a member of the exact demographic that Suzanne Levine targeted in this book, but I still found it to hold a lot of valuable messages. Everyone can benefit from a reminder that you continually have the opportunity to "invent the rest of your life." Times of transition are challenging and disorienting, but they are a chance to emerge with greater strength, focus, determination, and satisfaction.

This book is peppered with anecdotes (individual women's stories) that are fascinating and, potentially, illuminating. Issues relating to money, love, friendship, health, politics, and career are discussed.

I couldn't help thinking of my mom as I read this book. How I wished I could sit with her and talk about these issues together in person. Maybe I'll get a chance to in the near future :) And I'd like to revisit this book in ten years.

Jo says

My God, someone knows exactly where I am in life and how I'm feeling. And, there's a name for it...which means I'm not the only one. It's got a name, it must be close to normal. And it doesn't last forever. Whew! LOL! But, that's how I felt while reading this. I recognized myself throughout. Levine interviewed hundreds of women, and many scientists and other experts, to understand what really happens to us, psychologically as well as medically in our 50's and 60's, as we navigate these years. She makes a good case for her thesis, which is that not only our bodies are changing - our brains, needs and priorities are, too. The "fertile void" is a brilliant and spot-on description of the chaos and confusion of second adulthood as we sort out where we are now, what's missing, what works, what we want to do next, how we want to contribute, and where the energy will come from. The book is about rediscovering your passion and how to get there. Very practical and inspiring. This is a great book for women in their 50's but, frankly, if you're any younger, don't pick it up, you won't "get it". It would be a good book for a bookclub discussion group if all members are in their 50's.

Velvetink says

15/11/13 1 of 8 books for \$6 tuggerah library chuck out

Dawn says

I just couldn't get into this and never finished reading it.

Pam says

08/14/08

TITLE/AUTHOR: THE WOMAN'S GUIDE TO SECOND ADULTHOOD: INVENTING THE REST OF OUR LIVES

RATING: 4.5/B+

GENRE/PUB DATE/# OF PGS: Non-Fiction/2005/242 pgs

FIRST LINES: My 1st step into Second Adulthood was backward off a ninety foot cliff.

COMMENTS:06/25/08 rec via bookcrossing ring/ray. Very worthwhile reading about transitions in the lives of women 50 yrs old. Some of these changes may happen earlier or later but in general around that age point. Found the book validating a lot of feelings and reassuring. Did give you a positive outlook. The main thing I take away from this book is "you are not the same you just older". You still have choices and new adventures ahead of you.

The Overflowing Inkwell says

This book felt mediocre. Like there was something more, deeper, to the premise, but this book was just never going to get there. Be ready to read the sentence "you are not who you were, only older" 10000000 times; it certainly got old by the end of the book.

I felt like the author was pretty flaky, and that's fine, she's growing and learning things, but it didn't feel like she was really in a position to be preaching about growth and letting go of old things to other people. There were so many things she discussed in this book as being an experience young women never live through/appreciate/understand until they reach their Second Adulthood that I recognized in my own life as things I have done and moved through and learned from already. I know others that have as well. That she proclaimed them as being only for the older and wiser, that all of us 'young things' will just be flighty, uncertain, compromising girls all our lives until we hit menopause and suddenly realize these things - it grated on me a bit.

(There's one section where she says that young women nowadays will never experience 'bag lady syndrome', that the 26 year old researcher she interviewed didn't even recognize the term. Levine writes proudly that

"the notion of irrational money worries just didn't make sense" to the younger woman, and won't to any of the younger generations ever again, solely because we're more savvy with money handling than Levine's generation. And that's just complete and utter rot. She needed to interview a good deal more people - particularly anyone in a lower class than her own - to figure out a lot of what she perceived as problems now gone with the old days were very much alive and well in the most recent generation you could conceive of, no second adulthood or fertile voids required.)

Right near the end of the book, there was also a really creepy interview of a woman named Fran who waxed poetical about her granddaughter's vulva, contemplating it while she's changing the girl's diaper, and wondering at the marvel of the womb and life, and who would one day be in the little girl's womb. Levine celebrates this off-putting interview as just something spectacular, and congratulates Fran on the use of the word "vulva" because nothing says "Fuck You Fifties" (Levine's term) more than saying "vulva." Really.

Amy Young says

While I'm not there yet (the target audience was really 50 to 70 year-olds), the concept of a second adulthood interested me. Key line "You're not just you, only older." I sense the truth of that statement as I get older! However I couldn't think of anyone to pass it on to ... and so I did something I rarely do. I threw the book away.

Kathy says

Quotable:

As stored feelings bubble up and radical impulses are generated during Second Adulthood, we find ourselves revisiting ideas and experiences gathered over a lifetime. Things are adding up in new ways. Some women report a sudden loss of interest in the past. "I'm sick of saving things," one woman told me, "including resentments. I quit therapy recently because I didn't want to look back any more. I just want to move on." Others want to do just the opposite – to use their newfound feistiness to tell off historical bullies and clarify longstanding misunderstandings. "I see patterns now," says Mary. "And they explain so many events that I thought came out of the blue. That helps me look ahead."

We become more introspective with age. "In general," says Vivi, "the choices I am making are much more personal and quiet and involve less people... I don't want as many people around... and that makes it hard in terms of friendships that have kind of traveled with you. Perhaps the wave that carries them is nostalgia, because you've been together for so long. You don't want to lose those relationships... but I'm finding that I need a lot of away time, quiet time. Many people don't understand why I'm so comfortable being alone. But I don't really feel lonely.

Until I got feisty, I kept my voice low and listened for the signals from the outside that would answer a different set of questions: Will they like me? Will they approve of what I am doing? What do they need from me? You may wonder who "they" are – I wish I knew. The judgmental "they" was everyone else – including, I once admitted to a shocked friend, my children. For the most part I hid this anxious-to-please mouse, I made tough decisions, I expressed opinions, I held my head up. But that posture often felt like just another role – that of a competent self-confident grown-up. It's been called the Imposter Syndrome – the secret suspicion that you are faking it, that you are not really as good as things as others think you are.

[W]e are no longer the trend-setting generation; and we are less likely to make a major mark. So we are torn between those “facts of life” and what we fear are “unrealistic expectations.” Can I really start my own business? Can I fall in love? Get a divorce? Close up the house? Do I have what it takes to make changes in my life?

“We talk a lot about loss, and grieving, and ritual, and leaving time for that, for saying goodbye,” says Ruth. There are moments when it may seem as if nothing will be left once the leftovers and false prophets of a lifetime are cleaned out. And there are moments when the old ways start to look awfully good. “For every opening of a new idea or just seeing the light come in in a new way, means you are letting go of something, and that doesn’t feel good. Even,” she adds, “if what you are letting go of hasn’t been good.”

“I’m just not as ambitious as I used to be. I’m kind of enjoying just doing what I do well.”

Unless a woman can project a middling income, the choices of Second Adulthood may be a luxury she cannot afford.

The truth – especially hard for women whose mission it has been to hold everything together – is that taking charge isn’t about control at all; it’s about coping with the unexpected.

Even when women began to break out of the domestic framework, they – we – never broke free of that traditional thinking. We tried to do it all, to hold up both halves of the universe.

Riding the spirals: Instead of going around in smaller and smaller circles as tradition dictates a woman my age should do, and instead of retreading old dreams and assumptions as some of the cheerleaders for this age urge us to do, I now see myself riding upward and outward. As I look down, I see – and appreciate – the reassuring familiarity of my life so far. At the same time, each loop of my trajectory takes me somewhere I haven’t been, to something I can only know when I get there.

Paula says

Discusses phenomenon of middle-aged women redefining themselves into a 'second adulthood'. Many good insights and stories

Theme is "You are not who you were, only older". We have different priorities and are different people than we were in our 'first' adulthood.

I just don't care what people think anymore... I do care actually. It's simply that I finally care more what I think.. I call it the Fuck You Fifties.

The journey to second adulthood begins with an existential inquiry: Who am I NOW. Talks about the 'fertile void' a quiet hiatus time. A time to be still and make the transition from the driven overcommitted superwoman to someone whose priorities and passions are less rigidly managed and perhaps more deeply felt.

If we live by the maxim that time is money, we forget that TIME IS LIFE.

When the women I talked to reviewed what had been lacking in their first adulthood, self-nurturing moved to

the top of the list.

There are two types of human entities the dead and the predead. So while you're waltzing from predead to dead, have a lot of kids in your life, laugh a lot, have a lot of sex until the walls rattle and have a good time. (Quote from someone named Paula!)

Mary Karpel-Jergic says

Suzanne Braun Levine is an interesting woman and this is an interesting book. Part autobiography, part the findings from interviews with women past the age of 50 and part curation of what others say about aging, in particular, female aging.

An American baby-boomer this is an experiential journey for her and for any of us who are entering our later stage of life. This is the stage where middle age ends. However, us baby-boomers are writing the story as we go along as to what shape this journey might take in modern times. She raises some interesting and challenging questions about what it means to age in our current times. It's a call to recognise that we are entering, for the first time in history a second adulthood.

Her message is that we realise we will not be who we are but older. We will be different as well as older. "We are approaching the next frontier as women with new ideas and responses, whose priorities are changing. That's why answering the question, what's next? is not as easy as it may appear" We find we have outgrown our dreams of the past and they have little bearing on what we are going to do next. "So, we are a new kind of generation".

"Second adulthood is a mystery cruise to an undisclosed destination in wildly unpredictable weather, calling on ports dangerous and idyllic".

I am indebted to Suzanne to introducing me to the notion of the 'Fertile Void'. The prolonged state of confusion where you feel compelled to take action but have no idea what action to take. Currently I have a sense of 'stuckness' but this is to be welcomed as a necessary, albeit bewildering hiatus. "The solution, ironically, is not more movement but less. The cure for stuck is still" However, she recognises that not having something to do is a challenge for those of us who have lived by 'to-do' lists.

"A sojourn in the fertile void doesn't necessarily change our circumstances, but it does change the way our lives look to us."

"The Fertile Void is the long slow deep breath - the gathering in of strength - that precedes a daring leap into the unknown"

I enjoyed finding out that other women of my age have no idea what passion they wish to pursue. Apparently, the Fertile Void is like a archaeological dig in search of it. "We all have dreams and drives; the hard part is accessing them" (so true for me!)

This is an intelligent book about aging which is both hopeful and importantly, realistic. "The most serious threat to the management of our well-being is the dismissive power of ageism. Buying into a negative stereotype about our age group makes it more likely that a woman will accept as permanent what is very possible to change about her personal ageing process".

If you are over 50, have no idea what's next or what you want to do - then welcome to Second Adulthood and a chance to reinvent yourself.

Roni Blanche says

Have you ever been in the check-out line at Wal-Mart and overheard women discussing the exact same thing you have been going through or thinking about? And in that moment, even though you didn't join the conversation, you felt a tad bit better just knowing that you weren't alone in your experience or bat-crap crazy for your thoughts? This is what I've been feeling while reading "Inventing the Rest of Our Lives: Women in Second Adulthood" by Suzanne Braun Levine: that I'm not flying solo in feeling seriously screwed up from all this aging business.

I am 51. Yes, I'm finally ready to admit it but with my own twist: I am calling myself an AGELESS 51. This puts me smack dab in what Ms. Levine calls the Fertile Void, "where we begin the process of sorting things out -- and shaking things up. We shed the voices of shoulda-woulda-coulda thinking and begin to sense the presence of an internal compass, our own voice." Well, my own voice is saying, or more like screaming: Fertile Void, Smyrtle Void, this feels like the Amped-up Abyss to me. Nothing in my life feels right anymore. I'm frustrated. I've got all this mojo building up to barrel over the precipice of where I am and don't want to be and to change things, but it would mean jumping into the abyss because I haven't got the first clue what to do to make my life feel more right. Ms. Levine says, "No wonder the journey begins in a torrent of confusion. Many women find themselves at the edge of a cliff before they even realize something is happening. And looking down, they can't imagine what ropes and pulleys will guide their descent. They are propelled only by a funny feeling . . . a mixture of dissatisfaction and fear -- and a panicky sense that is it time to do something." You got that right, Sister! I want to do something, anything but, as she and others who've written about the Fertile Void validate, I feel stuck. And feeling stuck SUCKS! So what to do to unsuck my situation? Ms. Levine says, "The solution, ironically, is not more movement, but less. The cure for 'stuck' is 'still.' A gathering in of the energy unleashed by Saying No and Letting Go (two of the key aspects she describes as common in Second Adulthood -- being able to finally say "no" and let go of whatever no longer serves your best life). That is what the Fertile Void can offer, an opportunity to exchange the wish to control life for a willingness to engage living." I am all about engaging living, having recently dubbed myself an "Adventurista," so I'm working on staying still until the big reveal of what the hell I'm meant to do next comes along. It ain't easy.

Saying "no" has gotten easier for me over the years after I decided I was tired of being everyone's beck-and-call girl, especially when it came to family affairs that always seemed to involve rescuing relatives from crises of their own making and loaning money (more like donating as there was rarely ever any payback). But the "letting go" is a struggle, always has been. I am no good at accepting things I can't change -- like jonesing for the Tin Man's oil can to lubricate my creaky joints before I roll out of bed in the morning -- and releasing my expectations of how I want to look -- as good as Cher and Barbra, okay, I'll be more realistic and settle for Paula Abdul who is also 51. I am working on it, though, as Ms. Levine says the letting go is a necessary coping mechanism for surviving the transition to Second Adulthood. My first step was accepting that I could mess myself up BAD riding my skateboard Pinkie and releasing her to the care of my teenage niece who wants to ride. I miss seeing Pinkie standing up in the corner of the pantry, that hot pink confirmation that I am still a wild and crazy gal, but admittedly, that's all she's done for the past year anyway, so it was time for her to fly with someone a bit more spry.

What else did I learn from this book? I learned that there's a bona fide reason for my crankiness, or my

Ouiser-ness as my bestie Sara calls it from Shirley MacLaine's character Ouiser in "Steel Magnolias" who says, "I'm not crazy . . . I've just been in a very bad mood for forty years!" I have entered the Fuck You Fifties, as Ms. Levine calls the decade, a time of "speaking up, speaking out, speaking one's mind" and a spirit of rebellion that rivals our teenage years. I sure fit that mold to a tee; in fact, I should be the poster chick for the Fuck You Fifties! My sweetie DMan, the poor thing, sure gets an earful of me speaking my mind about anything and everything, including our relationship. As Ms. Levine explains, the Fuck You Fifties brings on a reexamining and redefining of our intimate relationships as women feel the need for more authority, independence and space in their lives. Therefore my age is to blame, not me, if we end up with a white line down the middle of our house separating my space from his. The way I've been acting, he may prefer it anyway so he'll have a safe-zone man cave where he can retreat when my Fuck You Fifties really get fired up.

There is a ton of good stuff in this book to help women navigate the journey into Second Adulthood. Reading many of the personal stories felt just like that eavesdropping Wal-Mart experience, giving me real-life examples of how to handle the twists, turns and roadblocks ahead and also making me feel blessed in some cases that my situation isn't worse. As always, I'm a sucker for quotes, and Ms. Levine collected some dandies! Here are my two favorites:

"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is or how valuable or how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open."

-- Martha Graham

"At this time in our history, we should take nothing personally. Least of all ourselves. Try to do whatever you do as an act of celebration. WE ARE THE ONES WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR."

-- Hopi Nation, "Wisdom of the Elders"

"Inventing the Rest of Our Lives" is not a quick read, nor an easy one. There will be lots of time spent with the book lying on your chest while your mind ponders all the aspects of aging Ms. Levine touches on; there will be times of skimming through pieces that don't apply to your life. But the book is definitely worth the time to help you figure out what matters, what works, and what's next for the second half of your life. Enjoy!

Roxanne says

It has been a profound relief to read this book, to see that women before me have felt this need to jump off into the unknown.

I give it five stars, but it won't be a fiver for you unless you're ready to read it. Not really self-help; more like a series of *Aha!* moments for women in late-forties/fifties and up. Of all my reading buddies, I think Linda would most appreciate it.

Ann says

Interesting read especially when she talks about the physical changes due to hormones and brain development. The message I took away is that you want to be your true self as life is short!

Jo-Ann says

The realistic and yet positive outlook on life after 50 underlies all aspects of this book. I enjoyed it and expect to revisit parts of it over the next few years. I found it particularly interesting that the author focused on the fact that there is easily a period of 1 to 2 years where women question what is next and that often there is not a cut and dried answer. She shares her thoughts, experiences and feelings as well as those of the many women she interviewed to write this book. I believe that every women will experience a sense of kinship in reading this book and come away feeling optimistic. I recommend this book to anyone approaching, in or beyond her fifties.

Divided into 3 sections:

- 1) Getting to What Matters: Letting Go and Saying No
- 2) Finding Out What Works: Recalibrating Your Life
- 3) Moving On to What's Next: Making Peace and Taking Charge
