

The Calm After the Storm

Life post-crazy hormones? It may surprise you.

BY ELLEN MICHAUD • PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER CHIN

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Why didn't you tell me?" I demanded. My stepmother laughed, tossed another card onto the discard pile between us, and shrugged. "You wouldn't have believed me," she said simply.

I glanced at her in exasperation. The truth of her words pushed past my annoyance and marched straight into my brain.

She was right. What woman in the midst of the crazy run-here-run-there life of a 40-something would believe that life after the perimenopausal hormone swings and the what-should-I-do-with-the-rest-of-my-life vortex is richer, fuller, and happier than life in your 20s or 30s?

My stepmother tapped one well-manicured nail on the pickup pile in front of me. "Your turn, girl."

My turn indeed. Picking a card, my fingers kept the game going while I thought about her words. Studies from Harvard to Wisconsin report that 50s' life is more satisfying than any other life stage. Unfortunately, the studies weren't set up to tell me why. But I suspect that the sheer joy of life in the post-crazy-hormones stage rests on the fact that...

1 I've got guts. Once you've rescued small children from certain death—like the time I did the Heimlich on my son's friend Tommy—and maybe walked along the edge of a knife yourself, nothing much intimidates you. Taking risks—quitting your job or telling evil people to mend their ways—isn't difficult.



"I'm not yet the person I want to be, but I like who I am on the journey," says Ellen.

2 I'm comfortable with my body. No matter how many extra pounds pad my hips or how far my breasts sag, this is the body that grew a child, gave it life, and nourished it until it could stand on its own two feet. Forget about cellulite. A body that's nourished a child is glorious.

3 Chocolate cravings have disappeared. The torture is over.

4 I know what's important. Family. God. Compassion. Forgiveness. Honesty. Love. Extending a helping hand.

5 Relationships are solid. All the interpersonal relationship things that caused upheavals throughout life are pretty much settled. I've come to terms with the fact

that no, my mother did not love me as much as she should have, and, yes, my mother-in-law would probably have preferred to have her son all to herself. But the man I married worships the ground I walk on, our son adores every hair on my head, and my friends feel that I make the best maple cream cake on three planets. Who can complain?

6 I know who I am. I'm bigger, bolder, and brighter than some people feel comfortable with; I hug just about anyone who comes within range; and I rescue dogs, cats, and little old ladies.

7 There's money in the bank. I may not be sitting on a pot of gold, but there are no more \$100,000-per-child educations to fund and I'm making more money than I ever dreamed possible at age 20.

8 I can eat cereal for dinner. And it doesn't have to be granola.

9 I can let somebody else drive. Looking back, I can see God's fingerprints all over my life. A nudge here, a stop sign there, a barrier where I was about to run off the road—I didn't arrive on this page or in your hands by accident. And that knowledge allows me to stay centered even in the eye of a storm. ●

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