

How to survive a mid-life crisis

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I was in the midst of that crisis of middle life. The one that made my eyes roll when I read of white women who felt they had no meaning. It always sounded like they inhabited a fog of luxury-malaise. They had to create drama because they didn't have enough challenge in their day. So they began dieting, exercising, shopping, and sleeping with friends. Most of them could get away with it easily, thanks to the cluelessness of their husbands who spent most of their time watching sports.

What a cliché.

I wasn't on the floor of the bathroom with Elizabeth Gilbert. I couldn't eat or love my way out of this. My depression was much more boring than that. In fact, when I began to tell people about it, their eyes would glaze over, and they would change the subject. They would mindlessly look down at their phone and start reading their Twitter feed.

So I went to a therapist. He fell asleep on me. He literally nodded off in the middle of my sentence.

I got so much more depressed when I realized that I couldn't even pay someone to be interested in my problems.

I wasn't sleeping with anyone but my husband. I had dedicated my life to a life of meaning. And yet, I was still falling in that fear of insignificance. I started to struggle with getting out of bed. I didn't want to take a shower.

Then, I remembered the words of Natalie Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones*. She was instructing her readers on how to compile a gratitude list. And she said that if we had nothing to be thankful for, then we should be thankful for the ground.

So I looked down. The earth would bear me, even when I felt like I had no support. The air would sustain me, even when I was not feeling nurtured. The theologian Paul

Tillich talked about God as the “Ground of all Being.” It was a rich metaphor. God was not above, removed, or distant. God was earthy and integrated.

The air would sustain me. I breathed. Then I went on a walk, and I wondered, “What would the ground tell me, if I listened? I mean, if I *really* listened? In the midst of my free fall, could I find some grounding?”

The air was damp. It wasn't that greedy moisture when the air hoards the water into an oppressive blanket of humidity. It was the sort of damp that came from the relief of rain. Cooling everything. I had been walking for years, but it had become a time to make phone calls, listen to new music, take pictures, or finish up an audio book. But in this moment, I hungered to hear the wisdom of the ground.

I kept my house locked up. Sealed tight so that I could conserve energy. I couldn't command the weather, but I had figured out how to make our home climate controlled. And so I had double-paned windows and lots of insulation guarding us from the elements.

I rarely thought about it, but when I walked outside, I realize that the world was singing. Birds, cicadas, dogs--it was like entering a murmuring crowd of people. I had to intentionally listen to the distinct voices. Trying to distinguish them, I heard the steady beauty of percussionists who repeat the same notes. How did they fit together so well, in their various syncopations and songs? Then I heard the rhythm of my feet on the ground.

The earth was reminding me that I am connected to the song, somehow.

It was great folly of modernity. We thought that when we closed ourselves up, had control, then we would achieve comfort in our singularity. When we were alone, when we no longer had the nagging needs pulling at us, we would find relief. Yet being human means contributing to that chorus--the singing, barking, and the cries. What we do affects one another. And it was through my ability to hear and our vulnerability to each creature and that somehow made my crisis subside.