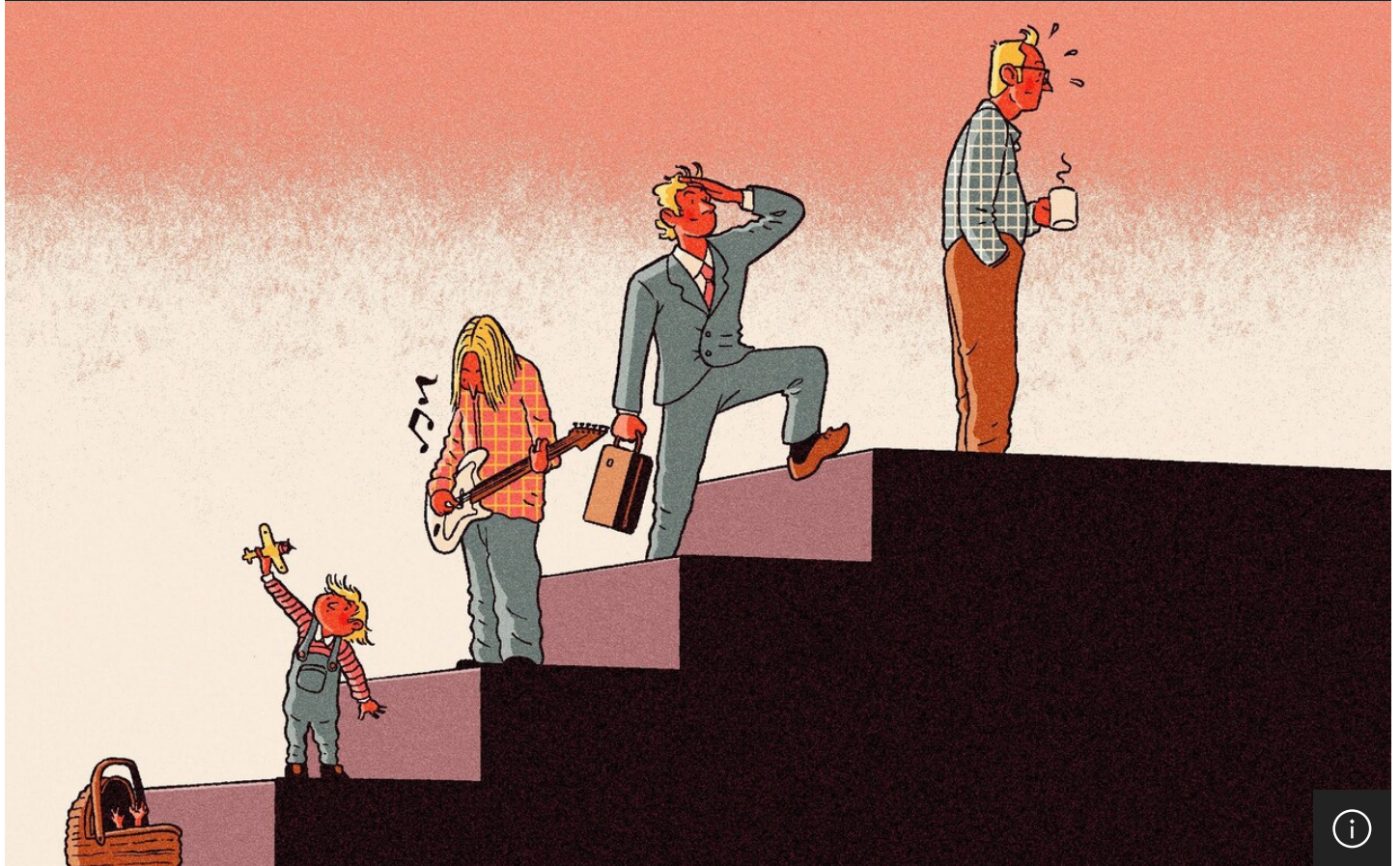




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## ‘At 44, I’ve lost sight of who I am and what I want. Am I broken or just being spoilt?’

I have friends and holidays and plenty of nice things going on but none of it is making me happy the way it seemed to 10 years ago

By Annabel Rivkin and Emilie McMeekan, THE MIDULTS

8 May 2023 • 11:55am



Dear A&E,

I feel stuck and trapped and lost and bored. I’m not depressed but I am desperate for change – I just don’t know what that change looks like. I’m 44, in a perfectly OK job and

marriage. I have friends and holidays and plenty of nice things going on but none of it is making me happy the way it seemed to 10 years ago. I know I should pull myself together but nothing seems to work and I feel more and more as though my life belongs to someone else. Am I just being spoiled?

– *Stranded*

**Dear Stranded,**

The midlife crisis has become a much-maligned term. Its clichéd resonance immediately makes us think of ill-advised decisions (Affair? Sports car?) fuelled by a hunger that we are all ready to – smirkingly – write off as pathetic. But a midlife crisis is not pathetic. And it is not spoiled. It is an identity crisis. And, it's meaningful. And it's everywhere. It is not just you, wondering what will happen next and if you'll be up to it. Or if anything will happen next... if anything will ever change. Longing for change but fearing change. Losing sight of what you want. Of who you are.

When this mood strikes, we can lose our sense of possibility. We can box ourselves into a corner which we believe is of our own making: the bed that we must lie in. All the choices we have made concertina up on us to press the bruise. We can become angry or hostile or jealous or just... flattened. All the things we don't want to be.

We took your problem to Dr Julie Hannan, psychologist and author of [The Midlife Crisis Handbook](#). “In therapy,” she says, “we call the experience of feeling lost ‘liminality’ which is derived from the Latin word limen, meaning threshold. Liminality is a transitory space, the space a person occupies as they change from one situation or perspective to another – it is an emergent, unstable ‘in-between’ space... where you know you can no longer continue to be the person you are as that just doesn't work for you anymore, but you don't yet know who you are trying to become.”

So many of us are programmed to be super goal-orientated. We grew up with the concept of “the ladder” that we would climb, ticking boxes on the way “up”. Life needed to show progress. But what is progress? A house? A child? A partner? A career? What if you have all those things and yet they are not delivering the contentment or fulfilment that you expected them to? You feel as though your life no longer fits. You wonder if you are the misfit. It's a crisis, Stranded, not a tantrum. And so we would counsel you to look at reconnecting with the power of possibility. And how do you do that? By reconnecting with yourself.

“People find contentedness and emotional stability in midlife when their identity and integrity are based on an internal sense of self,” says Dr Hannan. “This means they really

connect with the person they are and feel they are living a meaningful life according to their values and goals – a life they really resonate with.”

The thing is, Stranded, you are not the person you were 10 years ago, when you felt content with the life you had built. Something happens in midlife where we can find ourselves still run by the wants and needs and values that we had in our former lives; as our former selves.

“Values refer to what we find meaningful and important in life, guiding our sense of right and wrong and acting as the compass of life guiding our behaviour,” continues Dr Hannan. “To live well in midlife, our values, needs and goals must be current and related to who we are and who we aspire to be. Values tend to develop in our childhood and are set by our early 20s (achievement, power, success), but the values of an adolescent can vary greatly from the values of a midlifer (freedom, autonomy, contribution).”

And so now – as ever – it’s time to do the work. To find out what you want. What is valuable to you now? Is adventure rising up? Do you feel an urge to find purpose through doing service? Is your creative self under-nourished? This may be a crisis but it is also an opportunity (sorry) to recognise the values that are blossoming within you, and start to align them with the different areas of your life. They are blossoming but they are also battling to be heard.

Take a little time – go to the park, or hide in the cupboard under the stairs if you have to – and drop down into what you know. Write notes. Read books. Try new things. Talk to your friends. Get some therapy. Yes, this may throw up some small (or vast) hurdles but once you have broken out of your Groundhog Life, you will feel yourself again. Your new self. Your true self. Now go and do your homework.

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More from the Midults: [‘My mother left my sister £100k more than me, and I can’t move on from the injustice’](#)

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Does our reader have the right to feel so stranded? Please share your views in the comments below

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