



The author Gail Sheehy once said that no sooner do we think we've assembled a comfortable life than we find a piece of ourselves that has no place to fit. And as the definitive writer and commentator on all things related to life's various stages — including midlife — she nailed the insight.

These passages tend to have an arc. Just when you've settled into parenthood, the kids are so busy with activities that you hardly see them; then they're off to college. You're shocked to find that you miss the cold, wet soccer field and the boys wrestling on the floor more than you ever thought you could. Then, just when you attain that leadership position at work, you discover you're bored out of your mind and find yourself asking, "Is this it?" And just when you thought that you had smoothed over the rough patches in your marriage, your husband is suddenly shopping for a convertible — and who knows what else.

Sharon Teitelbaum, a master certified life coach based in Watertown, says clients typically come to her when they experience malaise. Women who feel stuck — particularly in the midst of their careers or when they're struggling with the lack thereof — are her specialty.

"What's been working for so long is no longer working," she says. "They're not sure why. They say, 'I don't want the life I have for the next 20 or 30 years or however long I've got to live. ... Have I peaked, and the rest of my life will just be mediocre and boring?'"

And so, just as one might need a wardrobe update after a corporate phase or a mommy phase, Teitelbaum says that people need "an update on their self-concept, their sense of themselves and who they are. The last time they took a hard look at themselves was 20 years ago or more. They're not in the same situation. They're not the same inexperienced person they might have been."

When she coaches women who are standing at a crossroads, Teitelbaum helps them scrutinize what's working and what's not working in their life and why, which helps them see who they really are — thus revealing the foundation for a second act. Typically, she

A TIME OF REINVENTION

Fame aside, Jackie O offers lessons about rediscovering one's passions

When Jacqueline Onassis was 45, she had a midlife crisis.

The health of her much older husband, the millionaire Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, was rapidly declining, as was the diseased state of what was a second marriage for both of them. Her daughter, Caroline, was in her last year of high school, and her younger child, John Jr., was a high school freshman, busy with his own friends and interests. Much of her day-to-day work as a parent was done, and aside from dabbling in charities, she had few other responsibilities.

Like so many parents of grown children who find themselves suddenly single — or just unhappy at midlife — Jackie had begun to think more about herself and how she felt empty. She had enough money to continue living a life of leisure, albeit one where she was always trying to escape the haunting assassination of her first husband, President John F. Kennedy. But what ambitions and talents had she tucked away two decades earlier, to become — in succession — a wife, the First Lady, an international fashion icon, a grieving widow, a single parent, and later, a stepmother and jet-setter?

The world knew she was beautiful, stoic, and rich, with impeccable taste and a soft, little-girl voice that turned out marvelous French. It did not know, or perhaps did not care, that she was interested in history and architecture, that she was a talented writer, a voracious reader, and a person of some ambitions of her own. Jackie was 45 in 1975, when society all around her was changing: the Watergate scandal had brought down a president, the Vietnam war was ending, the Equal Rights Amendment was still up for debate as women both entered the workforce and divorced in record numbers.

Within this context, Jackie was beginning to wonder how she should spend the rest of her life. What would make her truly happy? This was an especially difficult question for a woman whose pre-World War II generation and social stratum had bred her for nothing more than marriage, motherhood, decorating, and volunteering opportunities.

In this year of remarkable personal transformation, Jackie called upon her interests and passions from an earlier period of her life: writing, reading, and historic preservation. Yes, she lost



a husband. But she saved a landmark (by stopping the ruinous redevelopment of Grand Central Terminal), and she found herself (by pursuing a career in publishing that would span the last two decades of her life and produce more than 100 books). She also contemplated launching a career as a writer, publishing a piece in *The New Yorker*. All within a 12-month span.

Although some may find it difficult to relate to a woman who was so famous and wealthy, this was not an easy transition for her. Jackie's first attempt at looking for a job, at Random House, resulted in a stinging rejection. And yet she didn't give up, ultimately landing a job as an editor at Viking Press.

Jackie could never have known that she would be among the last of the pre-feminist first ladies, nor that a cultural revolution was coming. Today, in these post-feminist years, the mommy wars have centered on the *choice* of whether or not to work — even though many women do not have the option. For Jackie, defining — in her particular case — the second act was not about the money or whether to have a job per se. It was about her self-worth, about being immersed in subjects she cared about.

Although some women feel trapped by age, she seemed liberated by it. Jackie had reached an age when finding one's purpose beyond raising children becomes central to happiness.