

Who Are You Calling Middle-Aged?

I have never been middle-aged. I almost was, but just as I approached 45, and was resigned to reaching that particular stage of life, the rules changed. Word came down from WICSLSD (Whoever Is In Charge of Setting Life Stage Dates) that newly published actuarial figures lead us to believe 50 is a more realistic time to be considered at the mid point of ones life.

Okay, I could live with that and did, until I found out a few days before I turned 50, they moved the goal posts. A bulletin circulated: middle age now begins at 55. How could I explain my expanding waistline as middle-age spread, when, at 50, my status was still in limbo. All those marathon-running, mountain-climbing, kick-boxing grandmothers had done it again. In fact, their lobby argued, who could really say when middle age began?

I could. Enough already. On my 55th birthday, one dress size larger, silver threads streaking wildly through my otherwise dark hair, I thought: if not me, who? I knew a middle-aged woman when I saw one in the mirror. The title was mine.

Close but no cigar. As more Smuckers honorees were living to a respectable 110 years old, still playing bridge and, heaven-help-us, driving their Model T's around town, society was inclined to give a little more leeway to the 60-65 year old crowd. Maybe they were technically middle-aged, but they weren't sporting gold watches, yet. People were retiring later, having second and even third careers, and to all intents and purposes, middle age just went--Poof! Disappeared.

Result? I was never middle-aged. I went directly from young to old without passing "Go." Did I say, "Old?" Sorry about that. I am euphemistically called, a "senior", a title I share with 40 million other Americans documented to be over 65.

And that's what these essays and commentaries are about: living life in a world of bubble packs you can't open; electronics you struggle to understand; and expiration dates you can only hope don't apply to you. They're also about telephone menus, drug advertising, polls and more polls, computers and the endless advice given to us by the X Y Z

generations who are now filling the age slots we so recently vacated. In columns and books, we are bombarded with information on keeping everything from our hair to our gallbladders. We have anti-aging creams at our disposal; minerals and vitamins to keep our wheels spinning, and Sudoku to keep those little gray cells working overtime. We know, "How to Succeed in Aging Without Really Dying," because we've been told so often how to do it.

But as one who was cheated out of the entitlements of middle age, I'm wary of societal forces that are working so hard to keep me young. In other words, keep your handheld digital fire extinguishers away from my birthday candles. These writings are the way I see things now, while sitting comfortably on my couch, eating popcorn in the middle of the afternoon and watching movies that were young when I was.