

Introduction

Say Hello to Yourself

“Stop doubting your greatness and start living an awesome life.”

—Jen Sincero, *You Are a Badass: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life*¹

Many people say that we get three chapters or three acts in life, similar to a Broadway play: Act One, Act Two, and finally Act Three—that defining moment when you’re center stage in this drama-filled production called “life.” On the contrary, I say we get Five Chapters. From birth through the childhood years is **Chapter One**. This is the stage where your parents are your first teachers. They celebrate the small things you do: your first step, your first birthday, and your first tooth. Most parents celebrate your first birthday as though it’s your sweet sixteen, when you feel like you’re the princess in your own castle.

Then, come the teenage years, **Chapter Two**, the formative years, where parents are protecting, correcting, and instructing you about life, family, and the culture you’ve been born into. It’s a time of questioning, and you often wonder if you’re doing anything right. Yet it is a fun time where your personality is formed, friends are made, sleepovers are par for the course, and curfews are given (and often broken). If you’re anything like I was, my

attitudes needed to be “checked” often. You spend more time looking in the mirror as your physical body begins to get its curves and swerves, and you’re learning how to use it, dress it, style it, hopefully not abuse it, and gender-identify it.

As you mature into **Chapter Three**, you’re entering the young-adult years. High school is wrapping up, and you begin to understand what transition is all about. Words like commencement at your graduation have real meaning because you’re about to embark on a journey and go places you’ve never been, meeting people from all walks of life and cultures who you’ve never had a chance to encounter. You’re learning about selections, corrections, and the choices you can make—driving, dating, drinking, sexuality and sex, college, military, or working—but you still have your parent’s or guardian’s wisdom and guidance (or as much of it as you can stand). The seeds they planted in you are now called “life lessons,” and you are required to live *your* life. If your parents are deceased, you begin to consider how you’ll manage this part of the journey without their foundation and unconditional love. If you’re adopted, you might talk with yourself and others about your need to connect with your biological parents. Every time you turn on the television, ancestry.com starts running commercials until you keep feeling this “stirring” within you to know the “unknown.” But whatever your situation and relationship to your family of origin, there’s a gnawing of some kind at this stage of young adulthood.

You desperately want to break free from your parents but are still in their pockets, on their curfews, and must

still get permission to do certain things. You start seeking wisdom, approval, and credit from other sources. Now you have more voices offering their two cents than you can handle, so you must prioritize, remain calm, or act “wild,” if you’re willing to suffer the consequences. If you go away to college, you might realize that you have “feelings” for someone and, although your mom or dad is not in your dorm room, their voices are still very much in your head. You feel like a rocket, about to take off and explode, but not always sure where your landing pad is located. Yet you try going into many orbits, and your choices determine how much responsibility you may have or if folks see you as being from “another planet.”

Then before you know it, you’re in **Chapter Four**, your adult years. You no longer have to seek parental permission to do anything. You’re ready for *your* turn and to live your most blessed and best years. **FINALLY!!** Perhaps you’ve moved into your first apartment, condo, co-op, or home. Perhaps you received a college degree or spent some time in the military. Maybe you get married and maybe have kids, or you decide that you’re satisfied with your single life and don’t want marriage or children right now or ever. You may have saved and invested money, or you’re in debt. You’re clear on your socioeconomic path and determined to stay where you are, or get another degree, or work for someone else, or start a business to get further ahead. You may be focused on paying back student loans and establishing your credit.

During this chapter, it seems that in your thirties and forties you feel comfortable in your own skin, and as the

fifties near, you start thinking more about facing your mortality. Insurance and financial brokers start sharing sobering news that you're closing in on the halfway mark of midlife, and you must make choices not just for you, but for your future. You need to take a serious look at life insurance, your long-term health, and your lifestyle in the event your physical and financial situation changes. This is the time to decide what and if you want to leave to the loved ones in your life and how. Political appointments, involvement, or a run for elected office may happen during this chapter. You may remodel, rebrand, rethink, reimagine, refocus, relocate, restart, and remove some people or things from your life. You may reduce some things and reprioritize.

The COVID-19 pandemic really brought a lot of this to light. Not only were more women thinking about reinventing themselves, but we saw a record number of women start new businesses.

Of course, you may find that you don't want to start anything new or restart. You're sick and tired of starting over again. You don't want to pack or unpack another box, stand in a line, move forward without a plan, or for some, without a spouse or significant other. In fact, you start reprioritizing rather than repacking. You try to decide what you can throw away or give away, and from whom you can tear away, steal away, leave, or purge. For many, particularly as their forties and fifties end, they start decluttering, de-stressing and de-toxing from anything or everything that affects their rhythms of life. I have found many in this Chapter Four, who attend my retreats, usually so busy from

running themselves ragged that they declare “there’s got to be a better way.” So really what I end up doing is forging adult “play dates.”

You decide how much scrutiny you want to live under, if any, and how much anonymity. You realize that technology is here to stay and make a decision if it will be your friend or your foe. You may work for a campaign or against one or sit in front of the news broadcasts for hours hearing others’ viewpoints on a hot topic. You may contribute to the conversation every now and then—on your own terms, in your own timing. You’ve sat under and with the teachings of many, so you are well-rounded. You put dates on your calendar that are truly important to you. You’ve got real choices. If you’re in good health, or even if you’re not, you can choose to change the direction of your life. At the very least, you can make a list of the dreams you still have—your “bucket list.”

Chapter Four is often the sandwich-generation stage, which means you may have children to still care for as well as aging parents. Even though your energy has been good, you didn’t ask for this. You may have overcome a recent illness, received a diagnosis, or determined that you need more self-care. Sadly, you may have lost friends who were about your age, and you realize that, as the soap opera says, you do only have *One Life to Live*. It’s not time to *Search for Tomorrow* but to seize today. You decide what that means for you. And you often begin to face your own mortality.

Whether married or single, gay or straight, hooked up or looking for a hookup, or don’t care, you are making

decisions about who you want in your life at this stage of your journey. You're deciding who your heroes and heroines are, whether you want or need a life coach, and if you have the energy, health, or resources to do the things you've dreamed of doing. Of course, you may still have some debt, whether it consists of student loans, car loans, mortgages, or loans from (or to) a relative, yet you are more disciplined and have a better handle on your finances. Or, from a personal standpoint, you may have some baggage that you're really ready to deal with or shed. From a career standpoint, you can actually begin to see retirement. You may realize that you made some good decisions and some bad ones, and perhaps you are not sure if and how to get out of the latter. This is a moment when you decide whether you'll accept the status quo, not deal with it, or have just enough energy to challenge it once again. In many respects, you have started to establish a routine, some say a "rut-rine," and you're just not satisfied getting a cup of coffee at 7 a.m., eating a bagel at 8 a.m., and then vegetating on the game shows, followed by the news shows, followed by the nightly features. You know which shows are on when, and whether or not you identify with the story lines. So, *this* is how my Fifth Chapter is going to be?

"At age 20, we worry about what others think of us.

At age 40, we don't care what they think.

At age 60, we discover they haven't been thinking of us at all."

—Anonymous²

Say Hello to Yourself

Drumroll, please! You have arrived at your defining moment. Lights, camera, action, red carpet! Here we are together in our **Fifth Chapter**. I'm not just researching and writing about it—I'm *living* it. This is real life. I'm either "on the job, out of a job, no longer on the job, retired from a job, but not a lot of startups." You're just praying you can still "get up." **It's the chapter *after* your fiftieth birthday, and all the way until the end of life.** Most of us don't even put candles on our cakes—if we have a cake at all. Some of us have to watch our sugar intake, so it may just be small slice of pie, not a whole piece. This is when you really say hello to yourself, your real authentic self, and say goodbye to all the phonies, fakes, facsimiles, and fibbers. It's truly *fabulous!* You are free. You don't have to pretend. Your AARP card arrives, like clockwork, on the big 5-0 birthday, and its sobering. You don't have anything else to prove even though you never did but thought you did. It's all yours! It's what I call "making a 'you' turn."

Making a "You Turn"

Before, the world pressured you; now, allow it to pleasure you. Before, there were few options; now, you can create new options beyond receiving your AARP card in the mail. Your perspective is different, not difficult. Your assurance is fortified. You are confident, not arrogant. You can feel "a new thing" about to happen, perhaps just as Isaiah did, when he prophesied; ... can't you see it?" (Isaiah 43:19).

You can create new opportunities. Before, you said "hello, world" and hoped that others would respond and

accept you, not reject you or ignore you. Yet now, you can say with confidence, “Hello self! With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?” It’s really rhetorical. You don’t need a reply from anyone else. You ask and answer your own fabulous questions and do not allow others to interpret, intercept, interrupt, interrogate, intimidate, imitate, investigate, or overwhelm you. They may give you their opinions, and you can be bold enough to say, whether to yourself or to them, “I wasn’t really asking your opinion.”

When I was going through the long, drawn-out White House vetting process and Senate confirmation hearings for my post as U.S. ambassador-at-large, many had opinions about what I should or should not allow myself to do, and whether I should hold on or fold in. Many would always start with, “If I were you. . .” I remember saying to myself, and one day out loud, “But you are *not* me, and I don’t remember them asking *you* to go through the hearings.” I wasn’t being rude. I was just establishing my boundaries, building my confidence, and knowing who and whose I was. It was also a moment of having real clarity for what I was willing to tolerate as it pertained to or about *me*.

This is *your* Chapter Five, when you suddenly realize it’s all right to talk to yourself—and come up with your own fabulous answers! This isn’t the Hollywood TV show *Jeopardy*, where everything hinges on your final question and answer. This is *your* reality show, where you create the categories, realities, and narratives for your own life: fine, fit, and fabulous!

Chapter Five also ignites love emotions at this age, at any time of day, married or single. If you’re married, it

takes some renegotiating with your spouse, requesting new attentiveness, or sometimes requesting more space. You both redefine what being a couple means for you, and you read or re-read *The 5 Love Languages*.³

If you're single—whether widowed or divorced—it's very interesting to be in the dating scene once again. Whatever decade you're in, one thing is for certain: you can't relive your past, but you can create a great “right now.” You've grown; you have new needs; you're forming new perspectives. I like to say we're seasoned, but not sagging. If you're single or single again, you may glance at a handsome man, or search dating websites for the one who seems “right” for you. There may be a real desire inside you that's been waiting and raring to go or to come out. Dating sites or exclusive dating services may be on your favorite lists, and you find yourself picking up a copy of one of “Dr. Ruth's books referring to sex or Shmuley Boteach's book *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy*, or Christian books about sexuality, because Christians sometimes don't have honest conversations about sexuality, not at any stage or age, but especially for their “seasoned saints.” You may find yourself wrestling with your faith and your hormones. But sometimes you'd just like a companion to share with, to hold, to laugh and love over a meal while honoring your vow to single celibacy.

Your faith is also a revelation in Chapter Five. You have a long-standing relationship with God, and no one church building, or worship experience defines or limits your faith. Didn't we experience this during COVID-19? Most were not able to enter buildings, so relationships

became more of a priority. You take the training wheels off. You've had a lifetime on this ride. Especially now, in this virtual age, you can now decide if the services at your current church are meeting your needs, are too long, too stuffy, too rigid, too conservative, too narrow, or just no longer relevant or inspirational enough for you. Maybe it's no longer a good fit for you. You redefine what having a "church home" really means. Or maybe you've become so comfortable in your pajamas during the pandemic that using Zoom is a better fit for you. It's up to you to determine what you need, if, how, when, and how often you need it, and which, if any, ministries you will be involved with.

Another Chapter Five reminder happens when you ride on public transportation and the men now jump up and say, "Ma'am, would you like to sit down?" You don't want to admit it, but you really wanted to sit down and were praying someone would get up and offer you a seat. But the fact that they probably did so because of your age just messes with your head.

Now you enjoy certain freedoms, such as the freedom to choose what you wear, how you wear it, or if you'll develop your own style, without a stylist. The freedom is that you've paid your life dues, and the choice is yours to show up cute, seasoned, sassy, or salty. Didn't Jesus say, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" (Matthew 5:13). Stay salty, my sister. You've got savor and flavor.

Turning fifty doesn't mean you have to have a midlife crisis. It is the beginning of the rest of your life. Your best and most blessed days are yet to come, and you can rein-

vent, reimagine, rebrand, reduce, remove, retire, or even relocate. You can begin to alter your rules, live honorably but without so many restrictions. I slept until noon one day recently, at first felt guilty, and then freed myself up. There was nothing to do that day, no schedule, no agenda. My body needed the uninterrupted restful sleep, and I felt like a million dollars for the rest of the day. I had to change the rules that had been in my head for three generations. My mother had awakened us on Saturday mornings, as her mother had awakened her, to do chores and work on the family farm. But no longer are my kids around. I can clean my house on any given day at any given time (or hire someone).

You're not marching to anyone else's drumbeat now. You can have whatever you want for breakfast, brunch, lunch, or dinner. Maybe you're a circle that's been trying to fit into a square all this time, and you just found out that you can draw another circle, and this one's even better. Chapter Five is when you and God develop a deeper love and affection for one another, and the meaning of life is not sought after anymore. Instead, now your dance with the Creator is synchronized, and you begin to reflect on your life and whether it had been well lived. Some call it your legacy. It's asking yourself the questions "How did I do?" and "How am I doing?" You try to move as one (at least most of the time) with God. Revelations are stronger, and you begin to understand Acts 17:28: "In him we live and move and have our being." But sometimes the "moving" part gets out of whack, and you find the parts that moved when you went to bed suddenly go on strike the next morning, and refuse to move.

If truth be told, you can't run or hide from the numbers that follow your fiftieth year. Nevertheless, it's never too late to find new meaning, new insight, new significance, or new ways to express your age and create the life you want for this season. The main point I want to stress is that you must really give yourself permission and "just do it!" (as Nike reminds us). Regardless of when and where you picked up this book, this read is just for you. It does not matter what you have not done up to this point. What matters most is that you are ready to soar, to receive all that life has to offer. It's *your* time and *your* turn to live out this Fifth Chapter and make it the best chapter ever! Make it Fabulous!