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LIFE IN TWO HALVES THE ART OF BECOMING

Packing Light

I used to travel with trunks,
leather-strapped, brass-cornered,
each one bulging
with trophies from younger days—
ambition, opinion,
a fondness for being right.
I lugged them through my thirties,
wheeled them into forties,
and by fifty,
I was starting to wonder
if maybe I didn't need
three variations of the same self.
So I started unpacking.
Not all at once—
just a few grudges here,

a should or two there.
That one awkward memory
I kept under a sweater
from the '90s—gone.
It's not that I'm empty now.
Just... lighter.
Able to notice
the birds again.
To say, "I don't know,"
without checking the mirror.
To read poetry
without looking for the point.
The second half,
I've discovered,
isn't about adding more—
but knowing what to leave behind
so you can carry
a thermos of tea,
a notebook,
and both hands free.

A New Way of Seeing Life

At some point, we find ourselves standing at the edge of life's second half with a quieter kind of readiness. The kind that comes from having carried enough, for long enough, to finally ask, "What can I set down?"

The bags aren't as heavy as they once were, but they're still full. Expectations. Assumptions. Outdated maps of who we're supposed to be. And then, one day, we begin

to unpack a little at a time. A belief that no longer fits. A version of ourselves we no longer need to protect. A memory that's done its work.

And as we sort through it all, we begin to see that the road here has shaped us, every stretch of it. The seasons of striving. The years of holding it all together. The losses, the loves, the lessons we never saw coming. It's all in us now, woven into who we are. Most of it strengthens us. Some of it asks to be released.

This is where the second half begins.

Not with a blaze of glory, but with a deep breath. A lighter step. A willingness to let go of what no longer serves us, so we can travel with intention. Hands free. Heart open. Room made for what matters now. The road ahead isn't about becoming someone entirely new. It's about becoming more you. Clearer. Kinder. Less burdened by the weight of proving, and more alive to the wonder of simply being.

I first encountered the concept of life in two halves during a New Year's road trip with my wife, Jodi, to Cannon Beach, Oregon, a place that holds a special place in our hearts. We have a tradition of stopping by Trader Joe's for some of our favorite treats: apricot Stilton, cookie butter, and everything-but-the-bagel seasoning. On that trip, we had something particularly meaningful to accompany us: the audiobook of Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, which had been highly recommended by a trusted friend and colleague.

As soon as we hit play, we were hooked. The seven-hour trip flew by as we listened, discussed, and absorbed the book's profound insights. Both of us, just a year into

our fifties, were keenly aware that we were likely past life's midpoint—a realization that was both comforting and a bit uncomfortable.

Shifting from Social to Spiritual

The first half of life is a social journey—a quest for identity. We're busy going to school, building careers, growing networks, and starting families. It's a whirlwind of activity and ambition, influenced heavily by our upbringing, teachers, and society. We're in a massive learning lab, figuring out who we are and how we fit into the world.

But then something shifts. The second half of life invites us to go deeper, to move beyond the social constructs and external validations. Climbing the ladder matters less than uncovering true purpose. We start asking bigger questions: "What truly matters to me?" "What gives my life meaning?" This is where the spiritual journey kicks in, inviting us to reconcile our past experiences, embrace our inner wisdom, and align our lives with our deeper values.

Letting Go of Old Scripts

Carl Jung captured this transition perfectly when he wrote, "We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning; for what was great in

the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.” The rules and goals that guided us in the first half of our lives don’t necessarily apply in the second half.

In the morning of life, we’re building: careers, families, identities. We’re driven by external measures of success and validation. But as we move into the afternoon, we realize that what once seemed so crucial might not hold the same weight anymore. It’s a shift from striving to being, from external approval to internal fulfillment.

Embracing Paradox

As we step into the second half of life, something remarkable happens. We start to understand, absorb, and reconcile all the experiences we’ve gathered along the way. It’s like looking at a puzzle that’s finally coming together, each piece revealing a clearer picture of who we are and where we’re headed.

James Hollis, in his book *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, nails it when he says that our focus shifts dramatically as we age. In the first half, we’re driven by the question, “What is the world asking of me?” We chase success, approval, and all those external markers of achievement.

But then comes the pivot. The second half of life invites a more profound question: “What is my soul asking of me?” This isn’t just a subtle shift; it’s a seismic one. We start to move away from rigid rules and embrace

principles, learning to hold seemingly opposite concepts in tension. We realize we can be both objective and optimistic, future-minded and present, confident and humble, slow-thinking and fast-acting, introspective and outward-focused, careful and courageous. And yes, we can experience pain and joy simultaneously.

Paradox lives in the space between; it's the stretch and tension, the push and pull that we learn to live with, not solve. Holding two truths at once—like light and shadow, gain and loss, or hope and fear—opens up something rare. It asks us to let go of certainty and settle into the complexity. And maybe that's the point: If we're able to hold both, to see from both sides, we've crossed over to something richer, something more grounded and whole. It's the quiet mark of wisdom, landing on the other shore.

Navigating the Second Half with Grace

The beauty of this stage is that it allows us to lead more authentic and fulfilling lives. We become masters at navigating life's paradoxes, seeing that our greatest strengths often emerge from our greatest vulnerabilities. This journey of self-discovery and acceptance enriches the second half of life, turning it into a time of profound meaning and purpose.

The second half can feel intimidating because it often lacks the structure of the first, leaving us to figure it out on our own. Without that clarity, we can find ourselves

**Paradox is the quiet
mark of wisdom:**

learning to live in the
stretch between what
was and what's next.

clinging to first-half behaviors, delaying the transition to second-half thinking. These behaviors might include chasing external validation through career achievements or material possessions and focusing on accumulating more—whether wealth, accolades, or experiences—in a frantic attempt to fill existential voids. This “failure to launch” can result in what’s commonly known as a mid-life crisis, manifesting as an anxious pursuit to achieve or acquire more, even when those pursuits no longer align with deeper values. Carl Jung is often quoted as saying the first half of life is devoted to forming a healthy ego; the second half is going inward and letting go of it. While the exact source is debated, the truth it points to resonates. The first half is all about building—identity; achievement; a place in the world. But the second half invites a different kind of work. It calls us inward. It asks us to loosen our grip on the self we’ve so carefully constructed and begin the gentler, braver process of release. Our focus shifts from crisis to opportunity. It’s a chance to refocus, redefine, and realign our lives with our deeper, more spiritual aspirations.

Embracing the Wisdom of Age

Embracing midlife is recognizing and seizing the opportunity that comes with age. It’s shifting from a mindset of acquisition and achievement to one of meaning and purpose. As we navigate this journey, we can find peace in the transition, knowing our experiences have

equipped us with the wisdom to live more authentically and purposefully.

The second half of life provides us with the opportunity to leverage the hindsight of the first. We can step more deeply and confidently into who we are and focus on the relationships and pursuits that are most important to us. We can also let go of those things that have kept us from doing so.

I'm thankful for the friend who recommended *Falling Upward* to us. The work it inspired has been invigorating and life-giving. It has led me to some of my most important life and career decisions. First, I had to acknowledge that no one was coming to do that work for me and it likely wouldn't happen by accident (although sometimes life has a funny way of catching our attention). My hope is your interest may be likewise ignited to explore the opportunities that await you in your second half. I believe that with intention and the benefit of hindsight, your second half can be richer than your first. Your best years are not behind you—they await you.

TL;DR

- The second half of life isn't just focused on achievement; it's also focused on depth, meaning, and living "forward."
- This phase shifts from doing to becoming, letting go of old roles and stepping into something freer, truer.
- Midlife is full of paradox—joy and sorrow, movement and stillness—and learning to hold both brings wisdom and authenticity.
- This season offers a new kind of freedom in the chance to focus on what truly matters: relationships, self-discovery, and purpose.
- When we step into this shift with intention, our experiences become our guide, leading us toward a life that feels rich, grounded, and fully alive.

PAUSE & REFLECT

- What shaped the way you see the world? Family, faith, culture—where have they given you a solid foundation, and where have they set limits?
- Are you living your life, or just the life expected of you? If you peeled back the layers—expectations, obligations, all the "shoulds"—what would remain? And what would it look like to step fully into *that* story?

- What happens when you really listen—to yourself? When things feel “fine” but not quite right, what’s underneath that? A restlessness? A quiet knowing? What might change if you paid attention?
- What shifts when you view midlife as an opportunity versus a challenge?