

MENOPAUSE

My entire life has passed before me in the space of one telephone call and it feels as though my life has become a series of metaphors. The lady on the line from the credit card company asked, "And for security purposes, what is the date of your birth?"

And suddenly, I couldn't recall my birthdate. Immediately, I said to myself, Isn't menopause associated with memory loss? Maybe I'm slowly becoming senile and soon, all my memories will be wiped out. I won't remember the most simple things...

Oh no, God, please... Clean slate! Jesus, No! Ayuda me' por favor. Don't let me be senile.

The idea of menopause is not depressing. Menopause only means change. In Latin the term means the cessation of the menses, or what we loosely translate as "Change of Life." People find it depressing because of the significance they attach to it.

We begin in this world largely unconscious beings, unable to comprehend language or other subtleties. We express ourselves by our most basic feelings and instincts which is interpreted by the adults around us into fear, discomfort, happiness, and pleasure. Growing children develop linguistic abilities and then begin to verbalize. Next we enter the most difficult and scary stage, that in-between time, when we want to be sure of ourselves and be able to survive; the teen years. But I and most of the rest of us survived that.

Surviving change is very simple, because all of life is change. We change along with the world around us, we watch the passing of time evident in the seasons, and we grow from childhood to adults, in as long as it takes to snap our fingers. Life is one moment of compromises, followed by a continuous, repetitive cycle of compromises.

The realization sinks in - deeply - I am living on borrowed time. Suddenly like a flash, I begin to calculate the time allotted me, and how much I want to accomplish before I die but time waits for no one.

What becomes most depressing is the idea that one day, all of this changing and entering new stages, ends. Just like that, in the time it takes a drop of water to descend from faucet to sink, our life force leaves us. I clearly recall being around 6 and 7 years old, and pondering that this, that death awaits us all. I am frightened by the realization that one day, at a certain second in time, I will cease to be.

This ceasing to be is the same as the miracle of birth in reverse. After we are born, when do we realize that we exist? Do we actually have any awareness of our being before we are born? Whence does this awareness arise? Is it later that this awareness develops, when we experience discomfort and realize that we must depend upon someone to fix it for us? There is a moment in time when we clearly see that we exist. This stream of thought returns me to my childhood years, once again to face the realization that one day I won't exist.

Menopause looms like a second childhood. Once more I am face to face with my own mortality, wondering if there is any way around it, meditating on reincarnation or an afterlife. I'd rather believe in anything than the alternative, that for me, life ceases to be.

I look around me assessing my perusals, and continue longing. I even

consider the knowledge I've accumulated. The longer I live the more I long for immortality. I wish I could be immortal instead of dying. I start to feel sorry for myself. What if I've only lived and accomplished will only be remembered by my son, and less by his son, (if he ever has one) and so on, then some time, in the not too distant future, I will not be remembered at all. Does this make my life in vain? How many people can have the fame and the glory? I think harder about what my goal are and where this will lead me.

I think of DEATH. all the things I wont see anymore; buildings in myriad colors reflected on the Harlem River or the East River when I drive to work in the morning. I see a red and yellow fall tree, ice like diamonds clinging to a bare branch on a starkly naked tree... laden with green in spring and summer. the vibrant hues exciting my eyes, the seasons of life. One day I wont see this anymore I am afraid. I'm only fifty five yet death pursues me and lies in wait to envelop me in its shroud. When I was six these same thoughts plagued me as they did again in my early adolescence, and now they are here once more.

I await with trepidation, acceptance and determination. Menopause is the beginning of the ending phase, like the last one third of one's life. This may seem morbid but if we think like this, it will affect the way we behave. We will have more understanding of the meaning of things if we think of ourselves as a guest here on earth. In our hearts we carry around all the things about ourselves in a big bag, the things we say about ourselves and the things others say about us. I've begun to see the importance of how I let this said things affect my life. And the most important thing to remember, even when being morose, is that change often brings great beauty and wisdom. Menopause means change, thus one enters a different stage of one's life, something we are in charge of and can make the most of.

It's strange sometimes, because everyone talks about hot flashes in whispered tones, and I don't even know what a "hot flash" is. I was always a bit chilly before, so now I just seem a bit more warm. This was the same way I used to feel when I used to listene to other women discuss PMS. While I occassionally, on the heaviest day of menstruation, felt this low ache in my back that traveled to my my lower belly, it seemed that I could mostly not pay attention, and could just get on with it. If it felt really bad I'd take a few ibupophren and wait until I'd get home from work and just put an ice pack or heating pad on. Some of my friends had to call in sick every month. Now that that part of my life is over, and especially worrying about pregnancy month to month, I don't miss it at all.

Strange isn't it? Consider your mortality and in comparison most of life's difficulties seem petty. Think of this when you want to be say something mean or when you feel wounded. Even at this point in our lives, we can still make life easier, by our viewpoint and controlling our stress levels. Think of living on borrowed time in regard to all you hold dear, and then you will understand what I feel in regards to this change in my life and its meaning.