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Cara McDonough

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45 is the New... 45 : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Thursday February 29, 2024

45 is the New... 45

By Cara McDonough

I was strangely excited to schedule my first colonoscopy. Maybe because people told me that the drugs provide an excellent nap (now on the other side, I second this, although the preparation for the procedure is less "excellent").

But it wasn't just that. It was something — dare I say — more profound.

Forty-five, my current age (hence the colonoscopy) feels decisively middle-aged to me.

But while middle-aged seems like the right way to describe this stage, what it's *all about* seems less clear. Less bursting with possibility than my frenzied 20s; less staid than my 30s, when I had my three children.

My mother, who is 80, and whose advice I trust implicitly, once told me that your 40s are "the prime of your life."

"You know who you are," she said. "But your body is still in good shape. Prime of your life."

I've considered this in recent years, which have included some non "prime" experiences. At 44 I was diagnosed with arthritis. A minor inconvenience in the world of maladies. But that didn't stop me from exclaiming (*yelling*) at the orthopedist when he delivered the results of the MRI.

I'd figured I had a cool sports injury like a torn meniscus. Because I'm a badass. But no.

"I'M TOO YOUNG FOR ARTHRITIS!" The doctor smiled gently like he was well-versed with this type of mid-life crisis. The kind where you go from invincible to geriatric in the span of 30 seconds.

When I started waking up way too early, friends told me it could be perimenopausal hormones.

When my arm felt unusually sore at the gym, the trainer said it was likely tennis elbow.

I know these issues are *nothing*. Older people tell me I'm "young" — and I hear that, I do — but I'm not sure I've ever felt so solidly *my age*.

"What kind of 'prime' is this?" I think, questioning my mother's certainty on the matter. My mother, who gifted me the arthritic gene *by the way*.

Which brings me back (bear with me) a revelation of sorts I had at the gastroenterologist's office (I was, after all, 24 hours into the required "cleansing" and feeling a little spiritual).

"Welcome to your first colonoscopy!" the nurse had proclaimed, and suddenly my relative youth felt so tangible. I sat in the reclining chair in the intake room, a rare moment of peace in the happy hubbub of my current existence.

I felt ridiculous, frankly. But also... just right. Robe on, but open in the back — which is a real vibe! — legs crossed revealing black socks and comfortable sneakers.

On the precipice of something new.

And, yes, *there it was*.

In the prime of my life.

—Cara McDonough

Cara McDonough decided to be a writer when her sixth-grade English teacher thought her paper on Atticus Finch was good enough to read aloud in class. In retrospect, this was a very pragmatic decision for a 12-year-old. As an adult she has published pieces for national newspapers and other outlets, and regularly on [her blog](#). She received an honorable mention for her essay "45 is the New... 45" in the 2024 Erma Bombeck Writing Competition. Her favorite stories are about the ordinary moments in life that connect us all. She has a job in PR, and lives in Hamden, Connecticut, with her family.