

# *The 4 Stages of Life*

## *A Personal Essay and Workbook*



**By Steven R Unger**

# **The 4 Stages of Life**

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# The 4 Stages of Life

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my long-time friend and gerontologist Ken Dychtwald, PhD, who introduced me to the concept of Humanistic Gerontology in the late 1970's at The Sage Project in Berkeley, California.

This book is also dedicated to my classmates from Morse College at Yale University who encouraged and supported me in writing this essay/workbook.

And most of all, this book is dedicated to my grandparents and parents my brothers and sister and cousins, aunts and uncles and my children and grandchildren may they know me better.

# Prologue

This essay is intended to help other retirees reflect on their own lives. It can also be used to assist them in sharing their insights and observations with family and friends.

I intend to share this essay with my kids and grandkids with the hope of having them know me better and giving them a useful perspective on their own life journey.

In this essay I discuss the **4 Stages of Life**. For me, I view these as “quarters” each about 25 years in length plus or minus. You could also think of these stages as “chapters” or “sections”. Each stage usually has an identifiable turning point and may also involve a major life-change “pivot”.

To make this essay more interesting, humorous, and vivid, I do share some experiences from my own life as examples. However, this essay is not an autobiography. I intend to use the structure outlined in this essay to write a separate autobiography that may be of interest to family members and friends who want to know more about me as a person.

# Introduction

Who am I?

How did I get here?

And what made me me?

*I am 71 and my husband is 75. Up until April 2020 we ran a bed & breakfast for 18 years and hosted over 30,000 guests. Covid-19 forced us to close the business and sell our home. In the process we came to realize that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of our life had ended, and we were transitioning into and planning for the 4<sup>th</sup> and final Stage.*

Viewing our lives in stages is not very exact or precise but can be useful. Individual characteristics and life-experience vary greatly, and cultural and social influences are also variable. For this essay, I am focused on cultural patterns we see in North America.

I name the four stages as: 1) Growing Up; 2) Adulthood; 3) Maturity and 4) Elderhood.

*A friend of mine who reviewed a draft of this essay commented that “dividing life into 4 stages seems natural and has a long history. In ancient Hinduism, the 4 stages were called:*

*“Brahmacharya” the Student Stage*

*“Grihastha” the Householder Stage*

*“Vanaprastha” the Hermit Stage*

*“Sannyasa” the Wandering Ascetic Stage*

*Each was supposed to last roughly 25 years. After reading your piece I thought about whether I had turning points around 25, 50 and then more recently. Turns out I did.”*

While the number and length of stages may vary, there are basic themes that apply in some way to every stage:

## Ten Major Life Themes:

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| • Family         | • Personal      |
| • Health         | • Relationships |
| • Education      | • Sexuality     |
| • Social Factors | • Religion      |
| • Work           | • Spirituality  |

Within each of the these there are specific memories and events. These may occur at a specific ae, may involve joy or trauma, and may also result in a major life change or “pivot” .

Note that the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life also has the additional themes of Infancy (which may involve early childhood nurture and/or trauma) as well as the development of core values.

# The 1<sup>st</sup> Stage – Growing Up

## Introduction ...

To me the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life is about “growing up”. I think for most people this period ends between age 20 and 30. I use 25 years as an average.

Dominant themes in the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life are the issues of infancy; the development of core values, family; education; emergence of sexuality; and taking the first steps out into the world.

## Themes in 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life – Growing Up

<b>Infancy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Childhood Trauma</li><li>• Nurture</li><li>• Any memories</li></ul>	<b>Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Major Issues</li></ul>	<b>Personal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passions</li><li>• Dealing with Change</li><li>• Challenges</li></ul>
<b>Core Values</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive</li><li>• Negative</li></ul>	<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pre-school</li><li>• Elementary School</li><li>• Middle School</li><li>• High School</li><li>• College</li><li>• After College</li></ul>	<b>Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With Non-family Members</li><li>• Dating</li><li>• Marriage</li><li>• Children</li></ul>
<b>Family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mother</li><li>• Father</li><li>• Parents</li><li>• Grandparents</li><li>• Favorite Lines</li><li>• Brothers</li><li>• Sisters</li><li>• Cousins</li><li>• Aunts &amp; Uncles</li><li>• Extended Family</li></ul>	<b>Social Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Status</li><li>• Discrimination</li></ul>	<b>Sexuality</b> <p>Initial Awareness</p>
	<b>Work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work during School</li><li>• Work after Graduating</li></ul>	<b>Religion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family Practice</li></ul>
		<b>Spirituality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initial Awareness</li></ul>

## From Soup to Nuts ...

As shown in the table above, the most notable characteristic of the 1st Stage of Life is the breadth of scope of life experiences it covers. It can extend from infancy to, in some cases, getting married and having a child.

### Infancy ...

As infants and children, we cannot protect ourselves from real or imagined danger. Generally, someone else must do this for us. Thus, in the process of learning and growing, during the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of our lives we may experience being nurtured and/or physical, emotional, and interpersonal traumas. These experiences during infancy may be forgotten (unconscious) or remembered.

Trauma can occur throughout our lives for a variety of reasons, but we tend to forget or ignore early childhood nurture or trauma even though it may affect our responses and reactions throughout our lives.

### Core Values ...

During childhood, behind the scenes, we are being indoctrinated in various ways. Some of these may lead to a positive self-image others may lead to a negative self-image. These indoctrinated values are sometimes taken for granted or are sub-conscious.

*On the positive side, I was nurtured. I always knew that my parents loved me.*

*On the negative side, I was born legally blind and started to wear glasses when I was age 2. Although my family was supportive and nurturing, I later came to realize that one of the Core Values I developed was "I'm defective, but if I work really, really hard I can keep up." So, all during school I worked really, really hard, kept up, and went to Yale. The Little Engine that Could.*

### Favorite Lines ...

In reviewing your experience of your parents and grandparents you may want to try and recall their "favorite lines" or things they would routinely say.

*For example, my Dad would often say "everything always works out for the best". My Mom would often say "you better watch out"". So I just put them together and learned "everything always works out for the best, but maybe this time it won't, so you better watch out."*

### Education ...

In our family education was the ultimate good. We moved to suburbs that had good schools. Many activities could be justified in the name of education. Over the dinner table at night we talked about what happened in school that day.

*My mother once told me “Darling, we just want you to grow up to be happy ... and realize your potential ... and you have a lot of potential.” Message received.*

## **Social Factors ...**

The experience of social status and discrimination can play a key role in the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of our lives.

*In my case, I came from a privileged upper middle-class Jewish family. Except for the challenges of being legally blind, my life was pretty easy.*

*In retrospect, we lived in a “social bubble”. Our life centered around our family members, our Jewish country club, our synagogue, my Dad’s work and school.*

*We were aware of social discrimination against Jews, but this did not affect us in a personal way. Although when we moved to a new housing development in 1962, my mother informed the real estate agent that we were Jewish, in case they were planning to have a “restricted” community. She did not want to make waves.*

*My folks did not say anything negative about Black or Gay people. They just never said anything. The Black people we knew were household help. I had my first Black friends Freshman year at Yale. It would not be until I went to work at Xerox in 1983 (at age 33) that I really go to relate to Black people at work on a day-to-day basis.*

*Obviously, many Black people and minorities have had a very direct and personal experience of discrimination that I did not have.*

# The 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage – Adulthood

## Introduction ...

Somewhere between the age of 20 and 30 most people make a transition to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of their lives. I think of this as age 25 plus or minus. Growing up is done, and you take the first steps out into the world.

Dominant themes of Adulthood are work, relationships, sexuality, dating, mating, starting a family and facing unique challenges.

## Themes in 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of Life – Adulthood

<b>Family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Significant Events</li><li>• Receiving Help from Parents</li></ul>	<b>Social Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Status</li><li>• Discrimination</li></ul>	<b>Personal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passions</li><li>• Dealing with Change</li><li>• Challenges</li></ul>
<b>Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Major Issues</li></ul>	<b>Work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Job or Career</li><li>• Significant Events</li></ul>	<b>Sexuality</b> Awareness
<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post-graduation</li></ul>	<b>Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friendships</li><li>• Dating</li><li>• Marriage</li><li>• Having Children</li></ul>	<b>Religion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your Practice</li></ul> <b>Spirituality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness</li></ul>

## Family ...

Emergence into Adulthood means stepping out on your own. But even so, receiving help from parents (who are likely to be in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of their own lives) may play a key role.

## Work ...

Job and Career are a primary focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of Life.

*In my case, I shifted from being a social worker, to starting a word processing service when word processing was new, to working as an Office Systems Analyst for Xerox.*

## **Relationships ...**

Along with finding work, finding a mate or life partner is most often a key focus. This may also mean having children of your own and dealing with their 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life.

*Every long-term relationship has a story. In my case I had two long-term relationships.*

*I met Paul when I was 33. We were together for nine years. We almost never argued.*

*I met Dusty (now my husband) about three years after separating with Paul. We met through a classified ad that I had placed. The headline of the ad was "Hey Look Me Over – Bright successful professional seeks same. I didn't mention that I was bald or legally blind."*

*Dusty was a former Mormon and Viet Nam vet. We argued more in the first six months than Paul and I had in nine years. Dusty had six children who at the time ranged from middle school to college age. I got to know and love them all.*

## **Personal – Challenges ...**

At any stage in life, we can experience unexpected personal challenges. In my case this was living through the HIV/AIDS epidemic in San Francisco. So many friends died.

*The big change came in 1995/96 with the introduction of the HIV "cocktail". People were not cured, but they didn't die. The obvious comparison to Covid-19 is clear. The difference is that Covid-19 was able to be identified in months rather than years. And even today an AIDS vaccine has not been invented.*

Also, in 1994 my mother died.

*It wasn't a surprise. She had been sick for several years. She died at home with hospice care. When she died, I was sad but also remember feeling that she was now "free".*

## **Religion ...**

Many times, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life kids just go along with the family practice. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of Life people generally must consciously decide whether they want to continue or change to another religion or have no regular religious practice.

*In my case, I maintained my Jewish identity and feel Jewish, but have not been very observant, especially in recent years.*

## **Sexuality ...**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage of Life people may explore their sexual and gender identity. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of Life sexual and gender identity is usually established and publicly visible.

*I came out to my Dad first. He was accepting and not upset. We agreed we would not discuss this with Mom at that time.*

*After I moved from Chicago to San Francisco, my parents came to visit. We went out for dinner. My dad went to the restroom. My Mom took the opportunity to ask me if I was gay? I said I was. She responded, "it will kill your father." I said, "he already knows". My Dad returned to the table and my Mom asked him if he knew I was gay? He said "yes". She said, you knew and didn't tell me?" He said, "you never asked".*

*The next day I went out for brunch with my Mom at the Garden Court and the Sheraton Palace Hotel. She told me that she was worried that I would have a difficult life, no children and then die alone. I told her that I sometimes had such fears, but I did not think my life would go that way. I also told her that having her talk to me about that possibility didn't make me feel good about myself and asked her not to do it. She was a bit surprised but thought about it a while and said she understood. We never had that conversation again.*

*Thank you, Mom!*

# The 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage – Maturity

## Introduction ...

Somewhere between age 45 and 55 I believe many people transition to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of their lives. I call this stage Maturity. For some it may be considered Adulthood Phase 2.

Dominant themes include dealing with teenagers, ageism at work, physical changes, dealing with aging parents, and a possible life pivot.

## Themes in 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of Life – Maturity

<b>Family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Helping Kids</li><li>• Helping Parents</li><li>• Significant Events</li></ul>	<b>Social Factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Status</li><li>• Discrimination</li></ul>	<b>Personal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passions</li><li>• Dealing with Change</li><li>• Challenges</li></ul>
<b>Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Body Changes</li><li>• Significant Issues</li></ul>	<b>Work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Job or Career</li><li>• Advent of Ageism</li><li>• Significant Events</li></ul>	<b>Sexuality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness</li></ul>
<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post-graduation</li></ul>	<b>Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dating</li><li>• Marriage</li></ul>	<b>Religion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your Practice</li></ul>
		<b>Spirituality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness</li></ul>

## Family ...

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of Life. The focus on family takes on new dimensions. Their kids are probably now teenagers or leaving for college. They may become “empty nesters”. And for the first time they may start to also think about needing to care of their parents.

*In 2009, my Father died. In contrast to my Mother, his death was fairly quick and painless.*

## Health ...

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of Life good health may have been taken for granted. However, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of Life health issues may start to emerge. And for both men and women they start to experience bodily changes associated with growing older.

## Work ...

Usually by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of Life you have come good at doing something. You are no longer a beginner unless you choose to pivot and try something new. Also, you are no longer a spring chicken and may start to notice the creeping signs of ageism at work. If you are a doctor, a lawyer or a CPA this may not be much of an issue; if you operate in the corporate system in middle management this can be a life defining issue.

*In my case, I lost my last tech job in the dot com crash when I was 51. So, I set about looking for a new tech job.*

*It was as if I was a house painter who had painted houses for 13 years and responded to a house painter ad. I would be called for an interview and the interviewer would say, "Of the 300 resumes we reviewed; you are one of six we called for an interview". Then they would say, "we know you have successfully painted houses for the past 13 years, but we are only interested in people who have painted pink stucco houses recently. How many pink stucco houses have you painted recently?" I knew that my resume had already told them that I had painted red houses and white houses, but no pink stucco houses. I did not get called back for a second interview.*

*But my husband and I had a Plan B. We decided to move to Portland, Oregon, and eventually decided to buy a bed & breakfast. And in October 2002 we bought a 10,000 sq. ft. historic Victorian B&B just two miles from the center of downtown on the East side of Portland. We bought 6 books on how to run a B&B and we trained with the previous owners for a month while we were in escrow. We kept the existing staff and didn't miss a night.*

*This was a major life pivot. Up until then my self-image was wrapped up in my success at work in Silicon Valley. Given our new life, I was totally overwhelmed, depressed and anxious. So, I joined a holistic Healing from Depression Group, took medication, and started to practice Kundalini Yoga Meditation. Gradually I recovered.*

# The 4<sup>th</sup> Stage – Elderhood

## Introduction ...

In the United States today, the 4<sup>th</sup> Stage of our lives is often associated with some sort of “retirement” or “slowing down” or “stepping back” from the rigors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of our lives. This transition usually occurs between the age of 60 and 75. For many it comes with the realization that whatever you were going to accomplish with your work-life has probably mostly been done. You no longer must “prove yourself” or necessarily “keep up”. This doesn’t mean that you stop having pleasure, joy and adventure, or stop contributing to others and society. It just means that you do so from a new point of view.

Dominant themes: retirement from work, health issues, passions, new interests, reflections, becoming the top of the family tree

## Themes in 4<sup>th</sup> Stage of Life – Elderhood

<p><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death of Parents</li> <li>• Guidance to Children</li> <li>• Guidance to Grandchildren</li> <li>• Family Focal Point</li> <li>• Receive Help from Kids</li> <li>• Major Events</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> </ul> <p><b>Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant Events</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passions</li> <li>• Reflections</li> <li>• Dealing with Death</li> <li>• End-of-life Planning</li> <li>• Dealing with Change</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Issues</li> <li>• Dental Issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marriage</li> <li>• Friends</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sexuality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Awareness</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any activities</li> </ul>		<p><b>Religion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Practice</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Spirituality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Practice</li> </ul>

## Health – What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You ...

*I had a persistent dry cough for about two weeks. My husband finally prevailed on me to go to “urgent care” since I did not have an appointment. I agreed and figured I might have a bronchial infection and they would give me an antibiotic.*

*I sat on the table while they examined me. The nurse took my blood pressure and tracked my pulse. Then I was left alone for a while. When the doctor came in, I asked if I could go home now.*

*Doctor: No, you don't get to go home.*

*Steve: What?"*

*Doctor: You need to go to the hospital.*

*Steve: Why?*

*Doctor: Your heart rate is high; your blood pressure is low and your sweaty".*

*Steve: What do you think is wrong?.*

*Doctor: We won't really know until we do more tests, but I think you are experiencing atrial fibrillation.*

*Steve: Atrial fibrillation, what's that? I've only heard of that on TV commercials.*

*Doctor: Your heart has two chambers, upper and lower. Normally when your heart beats the upper chamber goes 'thump' and then the lower goes 'a-thump'". But when you have atrial fibrillation your upper beats at about 120 times per minute and your lower chamber can't figure out what to do.*

*Steve: But I just have a cough.*

*Doctor: Right, that's your body's attempt to kick-start your heart back to its normal rhythm. Sometimes we use electric shock.*

*Steve: But I came in for a cough. Is this how you usually find out someone has atrial fibrillation?*

*Doctor: No, people usually have a heart attack or a stroke.*

*Steve: A heart attack or a stroke! That's how you find out? Yikes!*

*Doctor: Yes.*

*Steve: OK, so I have to go to the hospital. I 'll have my husband drive me.*

*Doctor: No, you must go in an ambulance.*

*Steve: An ambulance?*

Obviously one of the key factors influencing your 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter are medical issues. I once asked a friend who is a gerontologist if anyone has written a book titled "So now you are 60" This book would outline for you all the physical, mental and medical issues that often become routine issues for seniors. It would be like the type of book given to new mothers telling them what to expect and what to do after their baby is born. My gerontologist friend said he was not aware of any such book for elders.

*In recent years I and my friends have learned a lot about heart, bowel, bladder, and dental issues. And issues of palliative care, end-of-life burial and estate*

*planning become more important. But no one sat us down and said, “here’s what to expect” or “here’s what to look out for”. We just discover it as we go along.*

### **The 4th Stage and your family ...**

Also, as parents and grandparents, from time to time we may be called upon to offer “wisdom” and “guidance” to our children and grandchildren. In my case, our extended family includes six grown children and thirteen grandchildren. From my perspective, the grandchildren are in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Stages of their lives. Our grown children are now all in their 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Along with medical issues comes the awareness that your children now look at you a bit differently. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of your life, you take care of the kids. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Stage of your life, your kids (who are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of their lives) start to take care of you. This also relates to the definition of the family “core group” who share in the joys and hardships in life. The core group can be large or small, but when push comes to shove, and something must be dealt with, the core group are the people involved.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Stage of our lives my husband and I have a special role in the family. We have become a focal point of family communication just as my Dad had been for my brothers and sister and me in his 4<sup>th</sup> Stage.

*In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of my life, me, my two brothers and sister talked to my Dad on a regular basis -- much more than we talked to each other. My Dad had the best overall picture of what was happening in the “family group”. Now, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Stage of my life, I can see that my husband and I are playing the center-point role in our family.*

### **Friends ...**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage of your life, your friends seem to come from the activities like family and work that consume your life. The 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of your life gives you the opportunity to rekindle relationships from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarters -- especially old high school and college friends. These folks are often dealing with the same transition issues as you are and are happy to share their life experience with you.

*In my case, a group of college classmates has held a bi-weekly Zoom call. Despite having gone our separate ways, we still feel a strong connection and are willing to share our life experiences. The encouragement and support of this friendship group has been very valuable to me.*

### **Reflections and Passions ...**

Besides reconnecting with family and friends, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of their lives, some people pursue or rekindle old passions and hobbies. And, sometimes they find new ones. In the age of Google and YouTube you can learn about almost everything any time. You might even try writing about your life story.

Elderhood is a time to reflect on your life. What brought you joy? What brought you sadness. What would you like to do with the time you have left? How would you like

that time to be? I don't really have a formal "bucket list", but there are a few things that would be nice if they could happen.

*There is a statement I once heard.*

*There are three things you need in day-to-day life to feel good:*

*Something to do*

*Someone to love, and*

*Something to look forward to*

## **Spirituality ...**

Even if you haven't been religious or spiritual in your earlier life stages, the advent of death may generate a spark of spirituality in your heart and soul.

*In my case, Kundalini Yoga Meditation has been my primary practice. It is a visceral practice performed with eyes open looking at the teacher. With the advent Covid-19 we went from in person classes to Zoom classes (which we initially thought would not work, but we found that it did). I sometimes nod out during class. My joke is that I am one of our teacher's prize students ... he is giving me away this week!*

## Summary

This essay is intended to provide the reader with a structure to gain a better perspective on their life.

Your personal experience may or may not fit into this four-stage model. Maybe your life divides more easily into two or three stages (or perhaps 5 or 6 stages?). But, whatever the case, thinking about the major transition points in your life will be useful to you.

*There is a romantic sci-fi movie that I recommend named "About Time". It tells the story of a British family where at the age of 21 all the males of the family gain the ability to go back in time in their own life and do over key moments. Watching the movie made me think about what moments in my life might I choose to go back and "do over."*

## Conclusion

I have told you some of my story. In conclusion, let me ask:

Who are you?

How did you get here?

What made you you?

I encourage you to document your own life history.

Why?

Because you are the product of your major life-changes.

Because you can now easily create a record of your life that you can share.

And, because your children and grandchildren will thank you if you do.

Let them know who you are.

## Questions to Ask Yourself

Now that you have read my observations it is time for you to ask yourself some questions about your life. The answer to these questions will help you think about each stage of life and your life overall.

### **Stage 1 “Growing Up” Questions ...**

How nurturing and/or traumatic was your childhood? Low, Medium, High?

What if any traumas do you remember from early childhood?

How did you cope with being powerless?

How would you characterize your family life growing up?

What was your experience of being in school?

What was your vision of “being an adult” as you grew up?

### **Stage 2 “Adulthood” Questions ...**

Was there an event or life-change that marked your transition from Growing Up to Adulthood?

If so, how would you describe this change?

How easy or hard was Adulthood for you?

### **Stage 3 “Maturity” Questions ...**

Did you experience a life-change from Adulthood to Maturity?

If so, how would you describe this change?

How was Maturity different from Adulthood for you?

### **Stage 4 “Elderhood” Questions ...**

Was there an event or life-change that marked your transition from Maturity to Elderhood?

If so, how would you describe this change?

What has been the most unexpected thing about your later years?

Have you discovered any new passions or interests?

## **Overall Life Questions ...**

Having considered the 4 Stages of your life, the following questions relate to your life a whole:

How do you see early nurture and/or traumas affecting your life?

Have you experienced trauma later in life?

How many primary relationships did you have in your life and how did they affect you?

What do you consider your greatest talent or strength to be?

What, if any, role does God or spirituality play in your life?

What role does love play in your life.

If you could travel back in time, can you identify any “do over” moments from your own life?

## A Short Example ...

In response to this essay, a friend described the stages of their life. Simple, almost poetic. (Note, some facts changed to protect the innocent.)

### **Stage 1: Growing Up**

- *Lived in the shadow of my older brother*
- *Grew up with older brother as best friend*
- *Lost virginity (age 14)*

### **Stage 2: Adulthood**

- *Got married (age 27 - pivot)*
- *Left film business for family business (age 28)*
- *First child born (age 31)*
- *Joined startup business that tanked. (age 37-41)*
- *Returned to family business (age 42)*
- *Joined a men's novice volleyball program (age 42)*
- *Went back to graduate school one class a term (age 49)*

### **Stage 3 - Maturity**

- *Youngest son graduated from high school (age 52 – pivot to empty nesters)*
- *Bought 2nd home (age 55)*
- *Kids take over family business (age 60)*
- *Became vegan (age 60)*
- *Earned Doctorate (age 65)*

### **Stage 4 - Elderhood**

- *Parents died (age 66 and 68)*
- *Focus on kids and grandkids (age 68)*
- *Continue to play volleyball in senior league*

## **Long Form**

### **“Thought Starters”**

The next 4 pages contain “bullet points” that can help structure the reader’s reflection on the 4 Stages of their life.

These bullet points are “through starters” that can jog or stimulate the reader’s memory.

These pages can be used as forms to fill-out or can be used as reference points in a conversation with a family member or friend when reflecting on, sharing, and discussing the stages of your lives.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Stage “Growing Up” Thought Starters

Infancy	Childhood Trauma Nurturing Any memories	
Core Values	Positive Negative	
Family	Mother Father Parents Grandparents Favorite Lines Brothers Sisters Cousins Extended Family	
Health	Major Issues	
Education	Pre-school Elementary School Middle School High School College After College	
Social Factors	Status Discrimination	
Work	Work during School Work after Graduating	
Personal	Passions Challenges Dealing with Change	
Relationships	With Non-family Members Dating Marriage Children	
Sexuality	Initial Awareness	
Religion	Family Practice	
Spirituality	Initial Awareness	

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage “Adulthood” Thought Starters

Family	Significant Events Receiving Help from Parents	
Health	Major Issues	
Education	Post-graduation Work	
Social Factors	Status Discrimination	
Work	Job or Career Significant Events	
Personal	Passions Challenges Dealing with Change	
Relationships	Dating Marriage Having Children	
Sexuality	Awareness	
Religion	Awareness	
Spirituality	Awareness	

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage “Maturity” Thought Starters

Family	Helping Kids Helping Parents Significant Events	
Health	Body Changes Signiant Issues	
Education	Any Activities	
Social Factors	Status Discrimination	
Work	Job or Career Advent of Ageism Significant Events	
Personal	Passions Challenges Dealing with Change	
Relationships	Dating Marriage	
Sexuality	Awareness	
Religion	Awareness	
Spirituality	Awareness	

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Stage “Elderhood” Thought Starters

Family	Death of Parents Guidance to Children Guidance to Grandchildren Family Focal Point Receive Help from Kids Major Events	
Health	Medical Issues Dental Issues	
Education	Any activities	
Social Factors	Status Discrimination	
Work	Significant Events New Undertakings	
Personal	Passions New Interests Reflections Dealing with Death End-of-life Planning Dealing with Change	
Relationships	Marriage Friends	
Sexuality	Awareness	
Religion	Awareness Personal Practice	
Spirituality	Awareness Personal Practice	

# Short Form

Here is an easy way to get started ...

<b>Stage 1: Growing Up</b>	
• Infancy	
• Early Education	
• Middle School	
• High School	
• College	
• Post College	
• Stepping Out into the World	
<b>Stage 2: Adulthood</b>	
• Career	
• Dating and Mating	
• Young Kids	
• Other	
<b>Stage 3: Maturity</b>	
• Career Part 2	
• Teenage Kids	
• New Physical Issues	
• Helping Parents	
• Other	
<b>Stage 4: Elderhood</b>	
• Disengagement from Work	
• Passions and Interests	
• New Role in Family	
• Old and New Friends	
• Health Issues	
• Spiritual Growth	
• Death & Dying	