

Beautiful

Welcome to our new column where we will share with you the creative, the expansive, the inspirational, the joyful, and the beautiful: mind, body, spirit and soul. We hope the stories and ideas we offer will encourage you to reflect on your own perceptions and open you to new possibilities and paradigms of seeing, understanding and experiencing beauty in all aspects of your life.

The Beauty of a Certain Age

By Penelope Jane Whiteley

When I was offered the opportunity to submit an article for *Insight Magazine*, I was told it would be for a recently introduced column, entitled *Beautiful*. 'How appropriate!' I thought, 'to be writing about beautiful women.' Why, because I work with women of a certain age, who are at their most beautiful, because of their age. A certain age is generally considered to be 45+, and sadly, many women put themselves through the second hormonal crisis of their lives by not accepting, or even recognising that they have finally stepped into their own power.

What is beauty? One of the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary is 'a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight'. And of course, every age has its own idea and ideal of beauty. Our particular era worships youth and all things youthful. Is this new? Not really. Youth has always been desirable. Alas, as middle aged women, we are in an age in which stick thin young things of 18 are - especially by the media - considered to be the most desirable women on the face of the planet; can they really be classified as women?

We are also afflicted with the age of celebrity. There are people everywhere who are famous for doing nothing. It is hard to tell if they have any talent or capabilities in the hype that surrounds their every utterance or movement or, dare I say it, thought (thought?). They have teeth so white you need to wear sunglasses when you look at them, they are injected with so much Botox their faces show as much expression as a wet loofah, and they are air-brushed within an inch of their lives!

But this is what we are stuck with... is it any wonder that so many women who are past the age of having to worry about the latest boyfriend, the latest lipstick or how long to wear their eyelash extensions, start to feel a loss of self-esteem? They stagger from those heady days of euphoric joy when they had hopes and dreams of a successful career and an exciting, adventurous life, into marriage, maybe children and working motherhood, or a career in which they found the glass ceiling early. They wake up one morning, look in the mirror and see... their mother!

And what are the advantages of aging for women like us?

- The ability to say what we like, when we like
- The abandonment of political correctness
 - Freedom - for whatever we choose
 - Saying no • Authenticity
- Eccentricity • Sexiness • True beauty

What happened to all that self-confidence? Where did the self-esteem go? Perhaps the loss of these two essentials is partly due to worrying about what other people think? After all, when we are young, we have the ultimate arrogance of youth to carry us through. As we grow older we are faced with so many challenges, physical and mental, it is hard to find an answer to the things that appear to ail us. We allow ourselves to feel worthless, unattractive and powerless. It becomes an issue of values. Do you know what your highest values are? More importantly, do you know where you are in your list of values?

For most women, life is about giving and being a carer. But the time comes when it becomes imperative to think of yourself as a glass of water, and understand you cannot give anything if you are permanently half full or nearly empty. It is necessary to keep yourself full to the brim by stopping and taking time out for yourself, with no feelings of selfishness and guilt. Any woman of a certain age, despite the wrinkles, the lumps and bumps, the sagging skin (it is, after all, just gravity!) the grey hair and all the rest, is at her most beautiful because she, along with her sisters, has reached the age of altered perceptions. Over the years she has acquired wisdom, life experience, knowledge, power, strength, and courage... and the rest!

These attributes ensure women who are 45+ have capabilities they cannot possibly have when they are younger and are able to add so much value to society. As a rule, they are far more willing to embrace change than their male counterparts and they are happy to adopt an attitude; and when better to do so? They have also developed the ability to acknowledge and practice gratitude.

To enhance the inner beauty that translates to an exterior glow (yes, we can still glow after 45, and I am not talking about hot flushes!), it is important that women accept responsibility for their life and let go of past hurts and perceived injuries. Smile... nothing is more beautiful than a smile.

In our mother's era, women were old at 50 and they were happy to fade into obscurity and 'grannydom' because there was very little else on offer. Today, if we choose, we can wear eyelash extensions and behave outrageously... in some places it is almost *de rigueur*! It is time we started celebrating all the fabulous and exciting advantages we have over our younger girlfriends, and everyone else for that matter. We really have been there and done it all. If we have not yet done what we wanted, now is the time to start. Step into your own power, step up and stand out. You have a voice, let yourself be heard. Let us see how much we can do to change society and its attitude to aging for the next generation.

We are more beautiful than we have ever been and it is time we acknowledged and owned the fact. We must accept how powerful we are, use our strength wisely and recognise our authentic self. Nothing is more beautiful than a woman with self-confidence except perhaps a woman of a certain age with self-confidence. Stand aside world - we are coming through! ①

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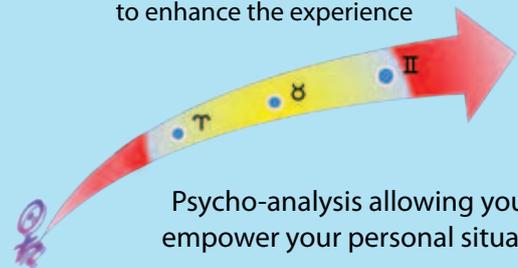


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