

The Quiet Bloom: Growing in Your Own Time

There's so much pressure on this timeline right out of high school, and it kind of does feel like you're really running out of time to find that thing or make it to wherever you think you're meant to be going.

Hi, and welcome to *You Keep Me Sane*. I'm Aileen, and I'm Julie. We're two friends navigating life's ups and downs together from opposite sides of the world.

How are you?

I'm good, thank you — but actually pretty chaotic, to be honest. You know when you just feel stretched and tired all the time? Everything feels full on. Hormones, deadlines, the house is never tidy for more than ten minutes. It's like life's turned up the volume.

I totally get it. I'm right there with you. My cortisol has been through the roof. I've been waking up at two or three in the morning with my heart racing, my brain in overdrive, trying not to look at my phone. Then in the morning I feel foggy, and my body feels heavy — like walking through mud, or treacle. It's like I've had loads to drink without the fun. How is this sustainable? Is this midlife exhaustion?

Sorry if this sounds moany, but it's so hard. It's not physical — it's emotional, the kind that sits behind your eyes. I know so many women listening will recognise that feeling, when you're quietly burning out and it never seems to lift.

A lot of people are going through it. I feel a bit lucky because even though my life feels chaotic and busy, I don't have that heavy, trudging feeling I had with perimenopause — because that was awful. But at this life stage, it's so easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. You're just focused on getting through the week, managing everyone's needs, stopping everything from unravelling.

Even if you're not in this exact stage — kids, households, constant demands — so many people feel busy, unsatisfied, or like time is running out. That sense of overwhelm or hopelessness creeps in. And wherever you're at, whether you're in the fog and chaos like we are, or just feeling like you'll never quite get there, we were sent something that really resonated.

It was a reflection by Dame Patricia Routledge, shared before her 95th birthday. Mrs Bucket — or Bouquet — from *Keeping Up Appearances*. And it was so unexpectedly moving. It felt like someone reached through the noise and whispered, "It's okay. You're not behind."

When I read it, everything slowed down. My shoulders dropped. I could almost hear her voice — calm, wise, gentle. It made me realise that maybe this messy, overloaded middle of life isn't the decline we've been taught to fear. Maybe it's just the middle of something still unfolding.

That's what we want to talk about today — what it means to bloom again. Even when you're completely exhausted. How midlife can actually be a turning point, not the closing act.

It's such a powerful reminder at any age to stop and really live where you are. In my twenties, I constantly felt behind, like I wasn't where I should be. There was so much fear and worry. What struck me about Dame Patricia's reflection was how honest she was about her younger years — that feeling of not being enough.

She talked about worrying she wouldn't be cast again, that she wouldn't live up to her mum's hopes. And that's so many of us, even into our forties and fifties — worrying about being good enough, about letting people down, about expectations we probably never even chose.

She said her life didn't really take shape until her forties. That gives so much hope, because we're conditioned to believe everything has to happen early — career, love, success, whatever that looks like. But for her, everything came together later. That's when she found a home within herself.

That line really stayed with me — searching for a home within yourself. Because you can have the job, the house, the family, and still feel untethered. There's so much pressure on timelines, especially as we hit midlife. It feels like time is running out to become who we thought we'd be.

And then she talks about landing the role of Hyacinth Bucket at 50 — the role that defined her career — right when society would have started overlooking her. She bloomed at the exact moment she was told she was past her prime. That turns everything on its head.

She didn't even know it would be the role of her life. And yet it healed something in her. She learned to accept her quirks. It's such a reminder that sometimes the things we do without expectation — just for joy — end up being the most transformative.

At 60, she started learning Italian, not because she had to, but because she wanted to sing opera in Italian. Pure joy. No outcome. No box-ticking. And it made me think — when was the last time I learned something just because it felt good?

We lose that as adults. Everything becomes outcome-focused. But learning and exploring for the sake of joy is what keeps us connected to ourselves.

She also talked about living alone without feeling lonely — about the wisdom of being content in your own company. Midlife can feel lonely even when you're surrounded by people. Kids need you less. Parents age. Your identity shifts. You start asking, "Who am I without all of this?"

What Dame Patricia shows us is that peace is possible on the other side of that question. At 70, she returned to Shakespeare — not to prove anything, but simply to be. And that's what we're all craving in the end: to stop performing, stop proving, and just be.

The first half of life is often about striving and achieving. The second half is about undoing all of that and returning to your essence. That's the power of midlife if we allow it.

It's confronting. Your body changes. Roles shift. You're forced to look at yourself without distraction. But if we're brave enough to let go of pretending and ask, "Who am I without the noise?", peace starts to emerge.

At 80, she began painting — flowers, old hats, faces from the underground. Creativity without ambition. Expression without approval. That's why her story feels so deeply spiritual. It's not about ageing gracefully — it's about finally living authentically.

This stage of life can be our treasure years. Not because they're easy, but because they're real. Because they teach us to value presence over performance and stillness over striving.

So maybe the question isn't, "How do I get back to who I was?"

Maybe it's, "How do I grow into who I'm becoming?"

Because you're not too late. Your story isn't behind. It's still unfolding. Midlife isn't a decline — it's a recalibration. Growth can be quiet. And you can bloom and come home to yourself at any time — 40, 60, 95, or beyond.

And maybe that's the greatest gift of ageing: the freedom to stop performing. Wherever you are, whatever season you're in, try to find one small way to bloom again. Learn something new. Say no without guilt. Sit in the quiet and listen to yourself.

Life doesn't stop being beautiful when it slows down. Sometimes that's when you finally start to see it.

As Dame Patricia said:

You don't need to be famous.

You don't need to be flawless.

You only need to show up fully for the life that's still yours.

Thanks so much for listening. We hope you're feeling a little more understood, a little less alone, or that something we've discussed resonated with you.

We acknowledge the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which part of this episode was recorded, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.