

Ep #6: What Would You Tell Your 99-Year-Old Self?



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With Your Host

C. René Washington

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“Do whatcha wanna,” the Rebirth Brass Band.

Welcome to *Midlife Woman Redefined*, a podcast for women near retirement who are ready to step into a new chapter of freedom, travel, and fulfillment. If you're ready to focus on figuring out who you are and what you really want, this is the place for you. Here's your host, master certified life coach, travel addict, and midlife maven, René Washington.

Hello, midlife mavens, this is C. René Washington, your midlife maven, and the host of *Midlife Woman Redefined*. And we are here for episode six, which centers around the question, what would you tell your 99-year-old self?

Wow, I am in a deep state of reflection, a deep state of gratitude. I'm just back from an epically spectacular journey to France and Morocco to celebrate my upcoming 60th birthday. I have been talking a lot about this 60th birthday. It actually occurs on August 23rd and my big celebration was this trip with – I guess there were 10 women who traveled with me. For the 14 days, there were at least seven that went the whole time. And there were, at one point, 11 to 12 that popped in.

And I'm in this deep state of reflection because this was a miracle of joy that we all experienced. And this question of what would you tell your 99-year-old self, because usually, when you hear that question, it's framed around what would you go back and tell your 21-year-old self or your 22-year-old self.

And that's a good question to ask, but it's done, you know. You can't do anything about that. It's over. And so I've been asking this question, what would you tell your 99-year-old self, because you have the opportunity to do something about that. And this is my role.

You know, to not let living your best life just be a cliché, just something you say, but to be actively committed to that every day in whatever way resonates for you – and as I sit here a few days before I actually turn 60 and I'm looking back on the decade of my 50s – and as I may have mentioned before, I thought, when I got to 50, that that was it, that I would

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have arrived, that I would have self-actualized. It would be a wrap and I would just be this fabulous 50 and all would be well.

No, that's not what happened. And I celebrated turning 50, I think I told you before, for 18 months because I was so excited about meeting that milestone. And the 50s have been wonderful. What they represented for me was a lot of shedding of shit.

It wasn't until I got to my 50s that I truly connected to and realized just how much crap I'd been carrying around, how much I was blocking myself through mindset, through emotion, through living in ways that connected to things that really didn't even matter, shoulds and oughts that I was living as fact.

And that's why my coaching practice is built around helping women shed their shit, shedding that mind crap that holds us back, because I know, from my own personal experience, how much it was holding me back and I see it in my clients' experience how much it holds them back. And so the 50s was about my getting deeper and deeper and more ingrained in connecting to exactly why I do what I do, why I wasn't doing things that I wanted to do and how I could fix that in my own life and then help other women fix it in theirs.

And so, one of the biggest things that we deal with as women is this need to be obligated to and self-sacrificing on the behalf of others, this belief that tapping into our own desires, doing what we want to do for ourselves is selfish and to be suppressed. And that is probably one of the biggest things that I let go and one of the biggest things that I help other women let go of.

And so the quote that I started with, "Do whatcha wanna," is actually a song called the Rebirth Brass Band. And I know in a previous episode – I can't remember which one it was at the moment, I'm still a little jetlagged so bear with me - that I mentioned that I ended my 50s with a second line. And that a second line is a New Orleans tradition of having a group of musicians lead the line, lead the parade line and you fall in behind the band and you become the second line.

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And as I was thinking about how I wanted to celebrate entering my 60s, I really had what I thought was a simple plan. I had never been to Paris, and so I decided that I needed to correct that, found a trip from Tracey Friley Travel. Look her up. She's amazing. That was titled In Search of Josephine Baker.

And her trip was actually centered around visiting Sarlat in France. It's a little town in the Dordogne Valley. We would fly into Paris and then get on a train and go to Sarlat and spend several days in Sarlat and visit Josephine Baker's chateau. Pretty simple, right? And that's what I signed up for. And I decided, since we were flying into Paris, that I would go in a few days early so that I could finally tour around Paris and get to see what it's all about.

And then I decided that I would put out – because at first, I was trying to decide, am I going to do this by myself? Do I want to go with my husband? Or do I want to go with girlfriends? And I ended up deciding to go with girlfriends because that's how I celebrated turning 50. So I said, okay, I'll do a girlfriend trip.

So I put out the call. I sent an email out to probably 15 to 20 women. And listen, you can't travel with everybody. It could be your best friend and you may not be good travel buddies. But I have been fortunate enough to connect to some truly amazing women. And what I learned when I turned 50 was – I put out a call then because I rented a beach house in a beautiful town called Destin, Florida.

And I put out a call then to my girlfriends and I decided then – I used to really try to cajole people to do things. If I thought it was going to be good for their lives, then I was like, I would just try to convince them to do it. But when I turned 50, I let that shit go.

And so I sent out the email, and whoever responded got the follow up emails. And we ended up having a wonderful time with that group of women. And so this email that went out, same thing. I sent it out. Whoever responded got the follow up emails. And it ended up that 11 women signed up.

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You know, there's this thing that I don't need a lot of friends, I just need one good friend, or this other narrative of I don't really have close women friends, you really can't trust women, women are a lot of drama, women are a lot of mess.

Okay, whatever, maybe that's true for you. It's not true for me because I purpose for it not to be true. I intentionally and purposely connect to no drama women who are committed to living their best lives, just like I'm committed to living mine. Those women are out there, believe me. It's all about where you are and how you show up and what you bring to the table when it connects to friendship.

And so this group of women committed with me a year ago to go on this trip. That was a stretch for me too, to commit to something so far out because, you know, so many things could happen, right? But we committed to going on this trip and as the time passed, Tracey Friley, the woman who curated this experience through her travel company, she added more to the trip. So she added a visit to Marrakesh, Morocco because Josephine Baker had stayed in a Riad in Marrakesh, Morocco.

So we were staying in the hotel that was a former Riad where she was supposed to have stayed. And so some of us signed up for that too. So this all ended up resulting in my being gone for two weeks, another comfort zone issue because I'd never traveled for that length of time, never been gone for that length of time.

And that was true for some of the women who signed up for the whole journey. And we can what-if ourselves out of so many things. And the women that came on this trip, I mean, we have work responsibilities. Some of them had caretaking responsibilities. Some of them have children responsibilities. And none of us let that stop us.

I was praying continuously, you know, we prayed and prayed that all would be well, that nothing would happen to bar anyone from going and that nothing would happen after we got there to make it deeply uncomfortable for somebody to remain or that they would have to come back home. So all of this was in our heads as we were planning this out.

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And then for me personally, I decided to have a birthday party in Paris and it was going to be a surprise birthday party because I was going to surprise my girlfriends because I was so appreciative of their signing up for this big trip with me. And I decided to, with help from Tracey Friley, I decided to do a dinner cruise down the Seine.

And so as I decided on that, it still sounded a little common to me, that that was something maybe some of them had experienced. You've been on a dinner boat cruise, maybe not in Paris, but like, what can I do to make this a little more of a unique experience?

And I connected back to my second line experience during my 50s and I asked Tracey to help me get a band that would meet us near where we would get on the dinner boat. And she told me that there was a bridge that you cross over. It's a pedestrian bridge. And my French is terrible, but it was the Pont des Arts bridge that we could cross over, that we could dance over with a band, and then go down to where we would get on the boat. But that sounded really cool to me.

And so she connected me to a band leader named Eddie. We communicated through email back and forth to set this up. And there were just so many instances of having to step out on faith as it connected to pulling off this trip.

And that was a big one because I did trust that Tracey knew that this guy was reliable, but I didn't know him, he didn't know me. But on the day of the party, we talked on the phone and reconfirmed everything we had agreed to.

And I told my girlfriends, all I would tell them was that they could wear what they wanted to wear, you know. Just be cute, comfortable, and casual. But be sure that they wore comfortable shoes, that's the only thing I would tell them.

And when we arrived at that bridge, I, you know, at the last minute, I did tell one of my girlfriends because we had to split up to get there and I didn't

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want them to know where they were going, so I needed to have somebody help me with that.

There was one woman that did know, and right when we arrived, we were in separate cars. I passed out handkerchiefs, because when you're in a second line, you're waving. You're waving your handkerchief or an umbrella. And so logistically, umbrellas were a bit much. I couldn't carry 12 umbrellas to Paris, so I brought handkerchiefs.

So we handed out the handkerchiefs, and when we got to the bridge, they saw the band coming and then it clicked in for them what was about to go down.

And I want to connect back. I'm telling you this story of one of the many things that happened during these two weeks. But this thing about being selfish, yes, this was my birthday celebration. I set this up to celebrate my turning 60. Some people might think that was a selfish thing to do, to travel across the world to have this birthday party for myself.

But I'm telling you, what happened was a snowball of joy; snowball of joy because when people saw what was happening, they saw us dancing across that bridge and I was looking real cute. And the comfortable shoes, well, I had on this little kitten heel shoes. And I broke the heel on one of them as soon as I got out the car.

So I channeled my inner Josephine and I took off my shoes. I danced barefoot across that bridge. And anybody who knows me, and my girlfriends were like, "What's going on with her?" I'm a huge germaphobe. And that mattered not.

It was going down. We were going to have a good time. If I had to do it shoeless, that was what was going to happen. And that is exactly what happened.

Now, I communicated with Eddie and told him because he wanted the band to play for 45 minutes with us dancing around. And I told him, "Look, Eddie, most of us are over 50. Several of us are over 55, so I'm going to need this to be like a 20-minute experience."

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Do you know, that band got so caught up that we ended up dancing that 45 minutes? But it was so much fun. And people were coming from everywhere that were just walking around because the Seine, it was flowing right outside the Louvre, so there were all kinds of people around and they were coming to watch us dance.

They were joining in. They were taking videos. People were so happy, just so happy. You could tell that everybody was having a good time watching us and dancing with us. And so that question of what would you tell your 99-year-old self, I would tell my 99-year-old self that I snowballed joy like nobody's business.

Because so many things – that was one highlight of that trip, but we started playing this game with each other, what's your top-five that you've experienced so far? And the top five would keep changing because every day the way Tracey had set up the trip, we were just being amazed every day visiting castles, dinner at five-star restaurants.

We had dinner in the Eifel Tower. One of my girlfriends planned that. And then we went to Sarlat and none of us had been to Sarlat. Most of us had never even heard of Sarlat in the Dordogne Valley. Just a beautiful picturesque little town that we were all saying, "We could live here."

We just had so many incredible experiences. When we got to Morocco, the king owns a hotel called the Royal Mansour. I just can't even tell you the opulence in that hotel. We had lunch there. We met a fabulous woman named Mary Ann who runs a resort there that has kind of kicked off the resort culture there in Morocco. It was amazing. It was amazing. And so it was just one thing after another.

And there are some people who talk a lot about what happened in high school, and that's fine. You know, I have plenty of memories that I revisit often. But that can't be the end for me. And I'm talking to the women that this can't be the end for you, that you want to be continuously amazed by your life, that you want to tap into the deliciousness of life.

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That was another thing; these experiences tapped into all of our senses. And I'm talking to the women that this is the role you want to be in. This is how you want to roll in your life. And, "Do whatcha wanna," is the theme song for if you can dream it up, start stepping towards it, and it will manifest into something even bigger than you dreamed because that's what this simple trip of, "I've never been to Paris, let's go to Paris," turned into.

What we experienced I could not have even asked for, but we lapped up every second of it. Our top five changed daily. And that's how I want to rock my 60s; continuously busting my top-five of experiences, continuously snowballing joy, continuously being open to all of the amazingness that life has waiting on me. And I want as many women as I can connect to who want to – if that's not your thing, then thus probably isn't your podcast because I'm going to be talking a lot about this.

But if that excites you, if that intrigues you, then you need to stick with me because this is what we're going to be focused on. How can we continuously amaze ourselves, surprise ourselves? How can we continuously snowball joy, snowball laughter, snowball love, snowball the beauty of this thing we call life.

So, happy birthday to me, happy birthday to you. Whatever you need to birth in your life, let some shit go, and get about living it.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Midlife Woman Redefined. If you're ready to learn more and reclaim your time, head over to crenecoach.com.