



WHAT'S A QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS? DANA PERINO

Graduates: Even though it's a long way off, you've probably heard about something called "the mid-life crisis" – men buy Italian sports cars; women go on yoga retreats to Bali.

But I'll bet you've never heard of a crisis you may be facing in a few short years. I call it "the quarter life crisis."

I know a little something about it, because I went through it. Oh, boy – did I go through it!

When I was 24, a lot was going my way – at least, on the surface. I had great friends. I had a great job on Capitol Hill. I even had a great apartment. So, why didn't I feel great about my life? I was working as a press secretary for a congressman. I should have been happy about that. But instead, I just felt...trapped – anxious and uncertain about my future. Where was I going? What was my next move?

On the personal side, things weren't much better. I hadn't had a boyfriend in years, and there were no prospects on the horizon. Marriage seemed like an impossible dream. I loved my friends, but I still felt lonely.

Right before my twenty-fifth birthday, I took a personal inventory (I love lists). It felt like I was falling short... almost everywhere. I missed my college days, which seemed, in retrospect, so carefree. The future just looked boring and hard.

That is what you call a quarter-life crisis. And I'd like to help you avoid it.

To that end, I bring you three pieces of advice.

One: Get out of town.

Feeling trapped? One of the best ways to set yourself free is to move – literally. After years of structure – high school, college, right into a career – I longed to be free. I wanted to be able to leave town at a moment's notice. So I stopped accumulating stuff. I only had one cup, one glass, one plate, one bowl, and one set of silverware. It was one of the best things I did for myself. It allowed me to be nimble in my life and my career. Assuming for a moment you're not married (if you are, congratulations!), you're pretty much accountable to no one. That will change. Take advantage of your mobility while you have it. Go where the opportunities are. But more than that, just go! That might mean going somewhere for a better job, or it might mean traveling whenever you get the chance. It's a big country and a big world. There's no reason to be stuck in one place, especially if that one place isn't working for you.

Two: You're not going to become a ballerina at 25.

You're still young, but you're not as young as you used to be. You don't have unlimited potential anymore. The last time you had unlimited potential, you were nine. At this point, you're pretty well formed – what you're good at, what you're really bad at, what you like and don't like. I'm not saying you can't change, that you can't grow. Of course you can – and must; but you are who you are, and you need to figure out who that is. To put it another way, what is it that you want out of your life? You need to make a realistic assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. Again, lists. This will help you take the next step in the process: setting a goal. Okay, ballerina – not practical. What is? Be honest. Figure it out. Write it down. Then, as one of my mentors told me before my first White House press conference, “Put your big girl panties on, and deal with it.”

Which leads to my final piece of advice: Meet the universe halfway.

No one is going to hand you the life you want. You're going to have to go out and get it. But there's a twist. You don't really know where your life is going to take you. You almost certainly won't end up where you plan to be. But that's okay, because when you set goals and work toward them, positive things happen. You gain skills. And those skills will create opportunities that never would've existed if you weren't working toward something. Life will happen along the way; things will change in ways you can't possibly predict, but nothing happens if you're sitting on a couch waiting for your life to begin.

I have a lot of other advice that will help you – like, don't skip the dentist. But when it comes to surviving the quarter life crisis, I think this will help.

Now, if anyone has any advice for my upcoming midlife crisis, let me know.

I'm Dana Perino for Prager University.