

# Midlife can offer new adventures

It's never too late to get the most from life

By Sheila Fields  
For Living & Being

While midlife can be a time to reflect on your past and focus on your regrets, it can also be a time to make changes and fulfill dreams that have slept in your heart for decades.

In the words of 19th-century English novelist George Eliot, "It's never too late to be what you might have been."

Though change is never easy, with help from supportive friends, family and possibly professionals, a person can reinvent his or her life by "making the choice to change and taking it one step at a time," said Ellen Smith, a Poughkeepsie counselor and certified life coach.

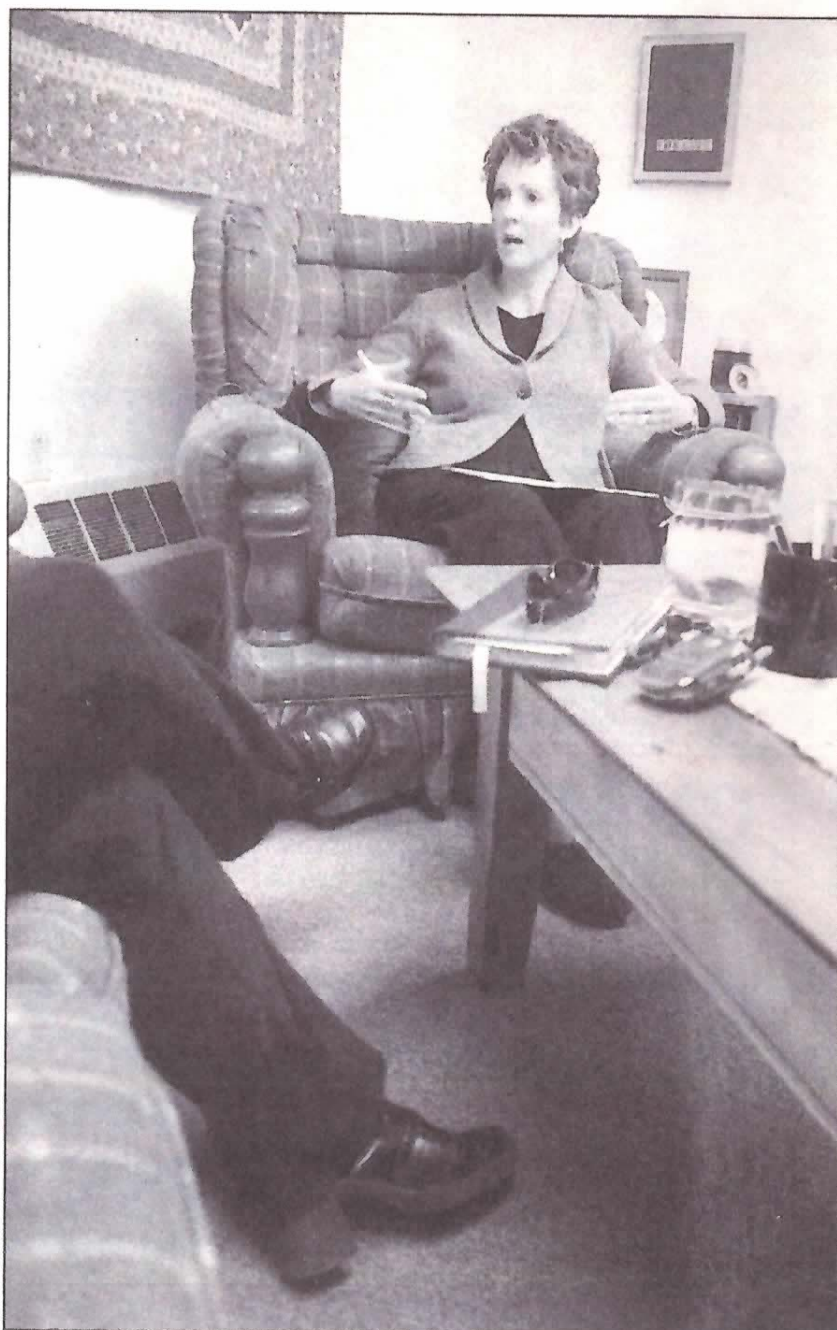
Smith, who conducts life-coaching groups for men and women in transition, said at midlife many people re-evaluate themselves "and often find that continuing on for the rest of their lives with who they have become is depressing, if not frightening."

Many forces can bring on a desire to make a major transition in midlife, she noted.

"Even though the drive (to change) can come from within, whether from hormones, regrets or (realizing one's) mortality, there is often an external catalyst that pushes people. Many major transitions are the result of other people's actions," said Smith noting how such things as a spouse walking out or a business failing can cause someone to alter his life.

## Back to school

It was an impending empty nest and close friends moving out of state that left Salt Point resident Linda Stoll "rather unsettled and restless. I knew I needed to shift gears and look ahead to the future," said Stoll, a homemaker and volunteer



Karl Rabe/Living & Being

Linda Stoll counsels a client at Fishkill Baptist Church in Fishkill. Stoll knows about changing course — she went back to college in her 40s to obtain a degree in counseling.

who went back to college in her early 40s.

"I had always wanted to pursue a degree in counseling and it became clear that now's the time," said Stoll, who completed a bachelor's degree at Nyack College and earned a graduate degree from Philadelphia Biblical University.

She is married and the mother of two grown daughters and grandmother of three.

"The educational process was intense and the commute was exhausting, but

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## HELPFUL READING

The following books may help you as you seek to reinvent your life.

- "Leap! What Will We Do with the Rest of Our Lives?" by Sara Davidson (Random House Inc., 2007).
- "Thinking About Tomorrow: Reinventing Yourself at Midlife" by Susan Crandell (Warner Wellness, 2007).
- "Stumbling onto Happiness" by Daniel Gilbert (Knopf, 2006).
- "The Dream Giver" by Bruce Wilkinson (Multnomah Press, 2004).
- "What Color Is Your Parachute" by Richard Bolles (Ten Speed Press)

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the rewards were incredible. I was stretched to the max. I loved ... the powerful anticipation of my dream coming true," said Stoll, pastoral counselor at Fishkill Baptist Church and a certified life coach.

Even though she loves what she's doing, Stoll said she believes there is more for her to accomplish.

"I believe that all our life experiences, education and work prepare us for the next step," she said.

It was a sense of spiritual doors opening and "wondering if God had a plan for me," that led David Eldredge, a former Wappingers Falls resident, to make a decision at age 40 that changed his life.

"I was in a very stressful position with a large commercial bank," said Eldredge, a former assistant vice president who was responsible "for more than 50 employees and the movement of about \$850 million a day."

While Eldredge enjoyed the work, he felt it was time to break out of his safety zone.

"I felt like I was truly missing out," he said.

Three years ago, Eldredge, who has long been involved in Christian service at his church, was contacted by Children's Bible Fellowship in Carmel regarding missionary work at the facility, which provides summer camps for children from the New York metropolitan area, among other ministries.

After meeting with the president of the Fellowship, "I knew instantly that this is what God had been preparing me for," said Eldredge, who accepted the

role of business and operations manager for the group after 18 years in the financial business. He quit his bank job, took a temporary position at IBM, sold his house and moved with his wife to the 200-acre campus in Putnam County while their son entered college.

While there are still stresses in his new position, it's more rewarding.

"I wanted to have a real impact on people's lives," he said.

### Confronting mortality

The feeling of wasted time is a significant theme in midlife because "we recognize the finality of our time" on earth, said Paul Schwartz, a professor at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh and a child and adolescent psychologist.

Schwartz, along with friend and Mount Saint Mary colleague Larry Force, a gerontologist, has written a book, "Regrets: The Cruellest Emotions," (scheduled for 2008 publication), which includes interviews with midlife men and woman, and focuses on their regrets, losses and personal transformations.

"Mortality hits you in the face at midlife and you understand time is finite. This causes stress since you realize you have more yesterdays than tomorrows and this may be your last chance to make significant change in your life," Schwartz said.

Schwartz added that a midlifer can ask him or herself two questions.

"When you look back 10 years from now, will you still be stuck in the same place?" and "If you had only six months to live and you could do anything you want when you wake up tomorrow, what would you do?"

Moving forward and changing your life, while not impossible, is often hard and people can stay in an unfulfilling job or bad relationship because of fear.

"They are terrified of change, and change is the unknown so they cling desperately to what is known," Schwartz said.

Start confronting your fears, he suggested, and with help possibly from a professional counselor or life coach and loved ones, move on to something new.

"Take a chance, take a risk and live life in a forward moving direction," Schwartz said. ♦

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## Where to start? Examine your life

With some 12 million Americans entering the midlife stage each year, according to the Web site [www.fortysixty.org](http://www.fortysixty.org), and the last of the baby boomers in midlife, many Hudson Valley residents may be re-evaluating their lives and gearing up to make a midlife change.

Following are some tips from Linda Stoll, a pastoral counselor and certified life coach, to help you as you seek to transition into the second half of life.

"Major life events like turning 40, the kids leaving home, job loss, divorce or the death of someone you love often jumpstart us into asking ourselves some hard questions about who we are and what we want our future to look like," the Salt Point resident said.

Stoll said she advises people to "get in touch with themselves" and spend time journaling through some basic questions including:

What do I want?

What do I need to do to make that happen?

What risks am I willing to take?

What fears do I need to face and work through?

What interests and abilities do I have?

What gives me joy?

What do others tell me that I'm good at?

"Gather as much information as you can, network with people, and pursue the training you need. Chances are that you can create a unique niche for what you love to do," said Stoll, who returned to college when her daughters were teens, earning bachelor and graduate degrees, and launching her own midlife change into a professional counseling and coaching career.

"Fear of the unknown often keeps us from moving ahead. Change comes hard for many people — even when their circumstances are less than desirable. Surround yourself with supportive people. Utilize the services of a professional life coach or counselor. And then take that first step and don't look back," Stoll said.

— Sheila Fields