

# Men in Their Third Chapter: *an Interview Summary Report*

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## Introduction

I interviewed 16 men for this project in March-April, 2019. Interviewees ranged in age from 43 to 59. The average age was 53. Interviewees live in: New York, Colorado, and California, USA; Quebec (Canada); South Africa; and Singapore. They were geographically and racially diverse, to be sure, though also not representative of a broad range of society socio-economically.

I undertook this research with great curiosity. I hoped to get a spectrum of perspectives from men in their second half of life (loosely defined) regarding their careers and the state of other aspects of their public and private lives. I wanted to learn how they regard this season in their life and to know what seems possible and desirable for the future; where men turn to for support; how they do that; and also what blind spots these men might have as they steer their lives into the future.

This Summary report starts with the section immediately below and is followed by a set of themes with **direct quotes shared in the interviews**.

## *Personal Interview Impressions and Reflections*

- Having a healthy, meaningful livelihood is fundamental to wholeness. It includes doing work that aligns with our values; provides a sufficient income; allows us to develop and grow; and is a pillar of self-esteem.
- Some men are fortunate enough to be in a place where their livelihood utilizes their unique gifts (assuming they know what these are). For others, this situation may be a luxury or scarcely imaginable.
- Wellbeing and feelings of wholeness are also connected to having a network of supportive, mutually respectful and enriching relationships. Or said differently, to be in community.
- Absent community, men may struggle to find support and be generative.
- In community, we have the chance to see and be seen, to listen and be listened to, to care and be cared for. The degree to which creating this is a priority varies among men.
- Lacking meaningful engagement with others has some feel isolated and less optimistic. “No man is an island,” said John Donne, though some men habitually operate that way.
- Some men feel or else *would like to feel* the presence of an inner call to guide the choices they make about the work they do, *especially as they reach their “third act” of life*.
- Creativity, optimism, and fulfilment are tied to how robustly that inner call is present *and* heeded during this third act.
- Heeding the inner call calls propels us forward. When our call is present, we face the world with greater energy and optimism. To *not* heed the call may invite fatigue, self-doubt, and despair.
- Some men hear a call for greater collective response-ability. They are in the question, what matters now to “us” (the community, the country, the planet, the biosphere)?

### **Personal Interview Impressions and Reflections - continued**

- Men are proud of their accomplishments. They entailed more than producing results; they involved a sense of adventure and what may be called captaincy.
- Men may not sufficiently recognize how they've been transformed by their accomplishments. Opportunities to create a more visible presence may be missed.
- With each accomplishment, expectations increase as does pressure to perform.
- Men may be undervalued, including by themselves. Courage and hard work are expected so what's the "big deal?"
- Men care about contributing to *others'* lives, including making it possible for others to be seen and heard; for making possible the continuation of *others'* livelihood, enabling others to participate in something innovative, or to experience safety or dignity.
- Where and how men choose to focus their attention on their work may be up for re-examination in their third act.
- Succeeding in their third act may also take something considerably different from any challenge previously faced.
- Interviewees were asked to identify what they would call their current chapter in life as well the next chapter in five years' time. The responses were revealing. (see p. 6)
- Age matters! It creeps up. Affects different parts of ourselves over time. Unsurprisingly, men compare their current level of energy to what they've had before or would like to have now.
- However, they are naturally concerned about what they may be losing, for fear of falling short especially in a youth-centric society. The third chapter can be a time of transforming one's relationship to what it means in our society to age.
- There is no roadmap for men in their third act to follow, unlike their fathers' generation. The familiar reference points are gone. This can be disorienting, it can be freeing, or, both.
- Aging has some men appreciate the gift of life even more, especially when they have experienced disruption from economic or relational hardship, loss of status, or loss of someone near and dear.
- The third act can also be a time of experimenting with and integrating new forms of: self-care; spiritual engagement; hobbies, and a heightened sense of adventure.
- Beyond the choice of activities one may start to pursue is the matter of who one is choosing to *be* going forward. This season of life can be uniquely creative and rewarding, fresh and invigorating.
- Some men are waking to the impacts of the patriarchal culture they have grown up in, been surrounded by – and arguably benefited from – and how that is casting its shadow over our culture. Signs of this shadow are present in nearly every sphere of life. Some men sense this as a threat and loss of power.
- Others see this as an overdue societal shift that calls for adaptation and enlightened masculine leadership. This adaptation may be very freeing and open whole, new possibilities for creative work in the world.
- Some men recognize it is the fortunate few who are privileged enough to pursue their calling without having to grind out a basic living, day in, day out, or be in an energy-sucking job

**Interviewee's Work (they might be a hybrid professional and wear more than one hat. E.g. Virtual CIO-DJ or Consultant-Actor-Speaker)**

Senior Management	Retail and Supply Chain Mg't	Teacher
Executive	Real Estate development	Educator-Truancy Officer
Administration	Business Owner	Social Worker
Actor	Writer	Managing Director
Organizational Consultant	Safety Consultant	Speaker
Linguist	Entrepreneur	Financial Advisor
Virtual CIO	DJ	BNI Executive
Trainer	Facilitator	

**Themes with Direct Quotes**

***Points of Pride – Touching on One's Significant Career Accomplishments***

- I went from corporate law, which I hated, to helping sell the family business. Being retained as president of the company was a watershed moment. I displayed a lot of leadership to our own people and bridged the gap with the new owners making sure everyone was trustful and happy.
- I've helped establish an Incident and Injury-free safety culture company-wide; this took changing the team's focus and driving that as a combined team.
- I made a significant career transition several years ago. It required lots of growth, lots of development of people skills, and learning how to engage and connect with clients at a high level.
- I do meaningful work with people helping them through trauma; people who don't have access to certain resources or the ability to develop healthier life processes.
- I had a high profile and huge responsibility, rolling out a new software system for inventory management. The best part was coaching and training my colleagues.
- I became a partner in the company 13 years ago and have helped it grow from 3 to 11 locations. I really enjoy that I get to focus on the people side of the partnership. I can't imagine doing anything else.
- I learned to succeed as an underdog, as a minority in the financial advisory business. And I'm succeeding by being good to people.
- Since I founded the business over twenty years ago, I've always respected the employees, who are mostly immigrants with hardly any choices available to them. I've helped them out of difficult situations, stood for them, and honoured and respected them.

***Ambition and Intention***

- I want to breathe greater creativity into what I'm doing (through music, writing, theater, performing arts).
- I want to be a catalyst for people especially in my community and country (South Africa).

- I want to lift others up, especially those not having the opportunities as a white male that I have, and without self-sacrificing.
- I have a couple of books and a couple of companies, at least, in me.
- Maybe my partner and I live in Europe again? Run a B&B? Regardless, it's about being of service in the world and if I could do that and make a living, great!
- I want to work in a public school environment as an administrator, teacher or both and get a healthy wage and have health insurance.
- My vision is to build on my 34 years in IT and be a Virtual CIO, traveling, working on IT strategy and solutions.
- Once our children are in college, maybe my wife and I will go elsewhere in the world and be change agents in a transformative way.
- The next challenge is to create scalability and big success with our restaurants so we become a large Canadian chain.
- It would be my dream job to coach a cycling team.

### ***Some Are Unsure of What's Next and How to Get There***

- I'm 52 and not sure I've ever connected with my passion. What I'd do next, if I left the business, is the \$64K question. And the answer is, "I don't know."
- It will take the patience to reinvent myself to try and match the skills sets I have to what the companies need. Or, do they just need a young kid to sit in the seat and go through the motions vs. hiring someone who can take them to the next level in inventory?
- Lots of men start to question their choices, sometimes having regrets about not having a more defined path in front of them. Then the path veers and they have to figure out how to get their footing back.
- It's been immensely satisfying to work with youth and help make a difference in their lives. Now, after 24 years, part of me wants to spread my wings.

### ***Struggle May Be Disconcerting***

- Many of us feel trapped, and are commonly not happy with what we're doing. Yet, there are all these messages that this is where we should be. We are carrying psychic wounds and pay little attention to this.
- A high percentage of men struggle and it has nothing to do with money. Very few people are centered. We have accumulated assets but may have no hobbies or know what to do. We're led down an empty hole. Happiness will never come from chasing the wrong thing.
- Some men struggle because we fail to listen to the alarm bells in time. We stay in unhealthy relationships and don't go for therapy.
- We recently moved across country and I haven't yet found a place where my creativity is rewarded. Coming up at 60, there's less time.
- I feel some ageism. I know I can run circles around people but after an interview, they shared with me that they weren't confident I could keep up with the pace.

- If you're drowning, you need to get oxygen, otherwise you'll sink. I don't go to work with enthusiasm. I go because I need to survive.
- Almost every day I want to quit because of the difficulty of working with one of the partners.
- The relationship at work with my step dad, who's still in the business part-time, is grinding on me. I may just call his bluff and walk out.
- You'd have to have real conversations with men to know there's struggle.

### ***On Experiencing Aging***

- Our culture shifts more and more to the younger people. Slowly you become less relevant.
- As I move towards the back 6th or 9<sup>th</sup> (hole), I think about the vitality piece, my physical strength declining, having less energy, libido and zip in my step.
- I don't care as much about things like, "did I say it right?" "Do I look right?" The tapes are still there but the volume is lower.
- I'm feeling a now-or-never pressure to thrive at what I excel at and doing that in a way that's helpful to others and to having a Livelihood.
- Being my age is pretty darn good. Any problems I have are first-world problems.
- At 52, I'm watching my body change, and slow down physically. There's less sex. There's a lot of pressure to have our act together: money, career, and body.
- I feel blessed. I don't have a 59 year old spirit. I keep a young mind and perspective.
- I've seen my body and energy level change. I'm not afraid of getting older anymore.
- I love being a man. The older I get, the more I understand and embrace my manhood, my sensitivity, my strengths, and my courage, too.
- There's a beauty about being an older, conscious man as I look to see where I can contribute.

### ***Life is Unfolding; Sometimes by Design***

- I've always been on the path and it's more than career: it's spiritual development and what human life is about.
- I'm healing as I come to grips with never knowing my father. I'd always avoided talking about this. I'm understanding better what I've been holding inside and what it's cost me.
- There have been some big life changes and I'm working with a therapist to help get on track.
- My wife and I are on a five-year plan, trying (again) for semi-retirement. We want to enjoy our time together while we're healthy. I'm very optimistic about this working out.
- I'm in "healing school" working full-time in an unpaid vocation of growing myself.
- I'm not much into personal development.
- I have an artsy side I'd like to explore. I like sketching.
- I have habits of self-awareness. This includes noticing when there's a sign or an event, and I follow it to see what it reveals. I try to pray and open up for divine guidance.

- It's a real journey with my wife. We come from different cultural backgrounds and haven't always understood how that impacts our relationship. We've gotten support to open our minds, to listen and learn.

***Writing the Current Chapter and the Next One***

<b>Current Chapter</b>	<b>Next Chapter</b>
Stability	Growth, Self-Awareness, Happiness
Truckin'	Still a Work in Progress
Transition; Intensification	The Grail Question
Finding Freedom	Living It, Enjoying It, Arrived
¾ of the Way Through	The 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wave
The Crossroads	I'll Take One of Those Paths
I Need Oxygen	Free at Last, Free at Last
I'm at the Center of My Life	Owning my Tools
Partly Capable to Deliver My Learning	Confident Engagement
Re-ignition	Roam
Exiting Head, Entering Heart	Entering the Heartful King
Surprised at 52	To Be Determined
New Possibilities	Taking My Rightful Place
Alignment	Post-Alignment
Sunset is the Most Beautiful Time of Day	The Return of Dawn
Something New, Something Different	Go Do Things! It's Fun to Be Alive!

***Men and Engaging With Others***

- I don't seek much support, unfortunately. Since the end of a relationship I was in, I no longer have a close knit group of friends.
- I pretty much don't have a community. I feel seen and heard through family and sometimes friends.

- Most men I spend time with are comfortable in their own skin, knowing what they're good at, what their contribution is; where we are reflecting on whether we are using our gifts and genius to make the greatest contribution we want to make – this is very common. There's a certain level of privilege associated with this: it's not about paying for the groceries or making the mortgage payment.
- I always look for help when I feel it's beneficial.
- Men need some help to refocus. They seem hardwired!

### ***Getting Revitalized – Strategies Vary***

- It's not common for men to have heartfelt conversations. Guys avoid this.
- There's a lot of self-sacrifice with my work demands. If I'm not at work, I take time with my young kids. I read a lot, I interact with my wife. My soul doesn't get nourished a lot.
- I feel like I'm imposing on my girlfriend.
- I'm very independent and not very coachable. I'm aware of the impact of that: the loneliness and lack of go-to resources.
- I surround myself with good people and am actively involved in activities that help me learn and grow.
- I want to speak and hear the truth with my friends.

### ***Importance of Family/Community***

- My partner and I play in the really deep end of the pool.
- Having real, authentic, and vulnerable conversations is all I do. With my partner and a few, select others, the most important things we talk about are the hardest. We go deeper, sometimes weep into each other's arms.
- My wife's and my lives will shift after our daughter finishes high school.
- My wife and I decided we want to learn about each other and the different cultures we come from and also take a step back to learn about ourselves, too.
- The "We" part, what my partner and I share, that is close, intimate, supportive, and mutually promoting, informs how we are in/how we want to move in the world.

### ***Valuing Time for Play and Other Pursuits***

- I build and fly model aircraft. I create a level of accomplishment through this.
- I am part of a Biodanza dance community.
- My partner and I have impromptu dates.
- For years, until finally saying yes, I'd put off going to Florida and spending 3 days playing golf with an old friend.
- I'm an evangelist for Medicine Journeys. The healing work is amazing and super valuable.
- What do I believe? Who do I want to be in the way I get money? Alignment.

- My wife and I are doing some side DJ gigs. I can get lost for hours mixing music and playing. It's really fun for me.
- My wife and I have begun participating in Latin Mass with Gregorian chanting. It's very deep and powerful to listen and chant.

### ***Culture as the Context for Our Lives***

- In my industry, it's 'Build the pile higher and make the most out of it, or, be kind – and fail.'
- I recognize the pain men carry that comes from the suppression of men in our culture. It comes out in phrases like, "Put on your big boy pants." "Man up." "Suck it up and get back to work."
- We're in a time of large-scale transition. What are my own personal transitional challenges, including being an older, white male, where the group I'm in has to rightly give up power?
- There's been a shift in how I view what it means to be a man in a culture of patriarchy and its destructiveness.
- Men at a lot of different ages are really trying to find their place and as being a man is being redefined, no one knows exactly what that is.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver

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