

The Columbian Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by Sofiya Grinyshyn, 9, Vancouver, Silver Star Elementary School



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Local people share their regrets and hopes as they enter their fifth decade

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

Amelia Earhart was just 22 days from her 40th birthday when her airplane disappeared while crossing the Pacific Ocean. She remarked before taking off on the world-spanning stunt, "I have a feeling that there is just about one more good flight left in my system, and I hope this trip is it."

Her comments reflect the crossroads of the age. Turning 40 can be inspiring as well as deflating. Most people in the 19th century didn't even reach that milestone birthday. But as medicine and sanitation improved, life expectancies dramatically rose. So did expectations and hopes. New crises emerged.

"This is the first time in history that people in their 40s, 50s and 60s are caught with their parents becoming dependent on them while they still have children in high school and college," said Dr. Barbara Ensor, a psychologist specializing in aging issues at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore, Md. "People in the middle of this 'Sandwich Generation' are pretty stressed out. They might have thought that this would be the time in their lives to take vacations and cruises. But that's turning out to not be the case. That can be depressing."

Add these new complications to classic mid-life-crisis feelings, and being 39 today ends up being more complex and emotional than ever.

Ensor said, "In a positive fashion, it's a time to stop and look and evaluate where you've been and where you are going. Do you need to make major changes? Do you need to tweak anything? Maybe it's time to go off on another career. ... If you are given to a more negative interpretation, this is the beginning of the end."

How are local 39-year-olds responding to the age? What have they learned about themselves in the process?

We decided to ask:

What's the one thing you want to do before you die? What's kept you from doing it?

“I want to go to Europe, see the works of Michelangelo. Money and children. My kids have been young, and I would have had to find somebody to watch them for an extended time.”

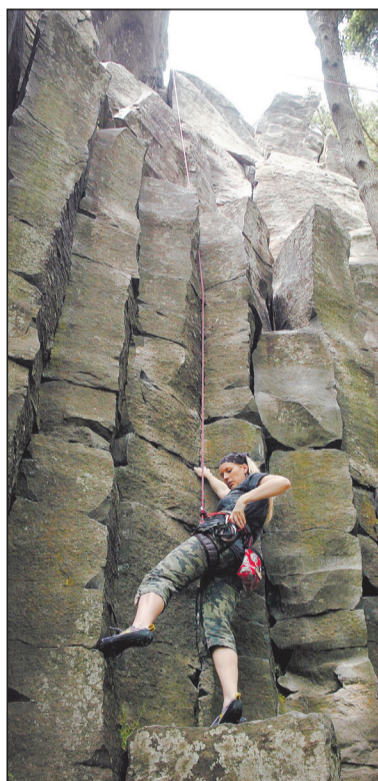
—Laura Kabel, Camas, housewife

“I'd like to climb 'The Nose' at El Capitan in Yosemite. For most rock climbers, that's the benchmark. I'd love that experience. I'm not really good about training. I like to just go out and do things. But, for that, I'd want to make sure I was in good shape.”

—Brandee Heppler, Vancouver, artist

“I'm adopted. I know who my birth father is, but I've never met him. That's something I've been thinking about my whole life. I think about it all of the time. I don't want to cause a problem. I don't want to interrupt his life. I just want to tell him that I'm doing well, in case he's wondering. I would tell him that I love him, and I'm OK.”

—Alison Seelbinder, Vancouver, merchandise presentation analyst



DAVE OLSON/The Columbian
As Brandee Heppler of Vancouver nears the age of 40, she still dreams of one day climbing "The Nose" at El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. She regularly practices at this wall in Lewis and Clark State Park in Troutdale, Ore., but isn't sure if she'll ever really reach her greater goal.

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More questions and answers from those turning 40.

Did you know?

Revolutionaries Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Che Guevara never made it to 40. All three were assassinated at the age of 39.

Zeroing in on 40

Other perspectives on turning 40:

“The (mid-life) crisis is often the gulf between your values and how you are living. I believe that 40 ushers in the time to start listening to the procrastinated whispers in your heart. 'Someday I will ...' 'When the kids grow up I want to ...' Truth is, don't wait to create a meaningful and fun life for yourself.”

—Gari Julius Weilbacher, personal life coach at Pennsylvania-based Coaching Partnerships, who has studied at Coach U, an international training institute

“What most persons consider as virtue, after the age of 40 is simply a loss of energy.”

—Voltaire

“We believe we should have accomplished certain things by 40. ... Many people believe that they should find a career for life and don't know what to do when they realize they're not fulfilled by it, or fulfilled anymore. They may feel inadequate for having a marriage fall apart. They may buy society's assertion that 40 is a milestone where opportunities begin to vanish. When, in fact, the mid-life crisis can be just the impetus one needs to make the changes that will make life better.”

—Dr. Carolyn Kaufman, therapist and psychology professor in Ohio, who specializes in teaching fiction writers to use psychology accurately in their stories

“I got plastic surgery, a new Range Rover, bought a commercial building. When you hit 40, you realize time is very precious.”

—Beth Shaw, founder and president of Yogafit, a Southern California-based institute of mind, body and fitness education

“Forty is the old age of youth. Fifty is the youth of old age.”

—A French proverb

“Many people accept 'good enough' jobs in their 20s and early 30s with the thought that someday they are going to take the big risk and move into the 'dream job' and make an important contribution before they die. Turning 40 sends them a message: It's now or never.”

—Rob Bennett, author of "Passion Saving: The Path to Plentiful Free Time and Soul-Satisfying Work"

your
Guide:

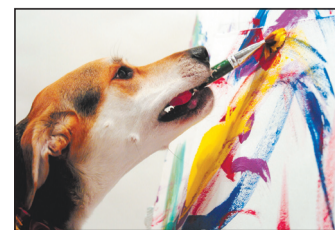


Dave Barry: Confronting medical care's darker side /D3

Travel: Exploring backcountry accommodations /D4

Books: Details make the difference in Pete Hamill's 'North River' /D9

'Ratatouille' star loves 'corny' films /D10



Coming Monday:

Doggie da Vinci's paint abstract works of art that sell /D1

Zeroing in on 40

What's the one thing you want to do before you die? What's kept you from doing it?

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“ I'd really like to see Notre Dame. The stained glass, the flying buttresses, the complexity of what's holding that building up. Probably finances. And scheduling time to do it; putting a map together of how to make it happen.”

— Steve Kuyatt, Vancouver, public relations and marketing specialist

“ See my first grandchild. By having grandchildren, I'll know that I succeeded as a parent, and it's all come around. Seeing my children succeed and having a happy marriage, that will feel like a success to me. Everything I do is about raising them to be wonderful citizens. My oldest daughter is 12. I'm not in any hurry to have grandchildren, but I just want see a whole lot of them before I die.”

—Roxanne Martin, Ridgefield, homemaker



Photos by DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

Roxanne Martin of Ridgefield, center, has devoted herself to raising her children, from left, Cailee, 11, Dallas, 4, Lauren, 12, and Bill, 9. The 39-year-old's biggest hope is to someday see her grandchildren.

What's been your biggest regret?

“ I've bought way too many classic cars, mainly muscle cars from the late 1960s and early 1970s. I've had 36. As a young man, that's what I did. ... But I've also got a '69 Mustang that I've had since high school. That represents the first couple of years of my marriage (to fellow 39-year-old Shelley Geil). She didn't like cars. That wasn't her thing. But when I went through that one from top to bottom, she was out there right with me, right next to me.”

—Matt Geil, La Center, owner of a swimming pool and spa contracting company



Matt Geil of La Center, right, says one of his biggest regrets in life is wasting so much money on different cars. But he feels that effort and expense was worthwhile on the 1969 Ford Mustang he restored with the help of his wife, Shelley.

“ Not maintaining a good credit score. I'm nearly 40 years old and still renting a home. It's been difficult since my divorce to get back on track. You never realize how important that (score) is until you've lost it, or screwed it up.”

—John Hall, Vancouver, utility contractor

“ Not spending more time with my grandparents before they died. I just wish I had learned more about them, about when they were my age. I saved their letters, which are treasures now.”

—Susan Strizver, Battle Ground, substitute teacher

“ Not having more children. I wanted a really big family. Some people might consider four a big family, but I didn't. I wanted at least six.”

—Shelley Geil, La Center, psychiatric nurse practitioner

“ When my oldest son was born. The umbilical cord, the blood, the placenta, his head, hearing him cry. It was just awe-inspiring.”

—Michael Birch, Vancouver, a former telephone operator who now is retired due to a medical condition

“ When they put the hood on me for my master's degree, I was shaking at the knees. ... At the time, I was 38, working 60 hours a week, and I had went to school for three years, with no summer off. To be Hispanic, to come from where I've come from and everything I've been through, I learned that everything is possible. Now, I want to go to medical school.”

—Jacqueline Heiny, Vancouver, mental health therapist

“ Putting the deposit down that started the construction on my first house. I thought, 'Wow, I actually own a house now.' As a kid, a house that cost that much would have been a mansion. It's by no means a mansion. But we built it. My partner and I, we were out there every day watching the construction.”

—Steve Kuyatt, Vancouver, public relations and marketing specialist

“ Finding out I was pregnant with twins. We were told that I wouldn't even be able to get pregnant. ... My husband wasn't at the ultrasound. I was in such a hurry to get home and call him that I forgot the (luggage) carrier was on top of the jeep. I took out the bottom section of the garage door. I ran in and called him. I said, 'I have good news and bad news.'”

—Susan Strizver, Battle Ground, substitute teacher

“ In college, I was an exchange student in Spain, and I spent New Year's Eve in Venice, in the Piazza San Marco. At midnight, everyone there shakes their bottles of champagne. I wasn't expecting to get sprayed with champagne. Then they broke the bottles. That was a big surprise. I had no idea that was coming. Getting sprayed with champagne, and bottles flying everywhere.”

—Daphne Morrison, Vancouver, social worker

What's been the most thrilling moment of your life?

If you could go back in time and tell yourself something at 20, what would it be?

“ I was a people pleaser when I was young, so it would be, 'Don't worry what everyone thinks.' ... One time a friend called and wanted me to come over for dinner. I was tired. I wanted to be by myself. But I didn't want to hurt her feelings, either. I should have just said, 'I'm really tired. I'd like to stay home and relax.' I was worried about her feelings, making her feel rejected. Then, I ran into her that night at the grocery store. That was awkward.”

—Misha Piccola, Vancouver, supply planner for Hewlett-Packard Co.

“ Be more patient. I think that most of the mistakes I ever made were because I was impatient. I would try to rush to do something or try to get a result quickly. I wasn't patient with myself or others or with my abilities.”

—Brandee Heppler, Vancouver, artist

“ I'd give myself the numbers to the Powerballs. So I'd be able to be rich. Living paycheck to paycheck sucks.”

—Michael Birch, Vancouver, former telephone operator who now is retired due to a medical condition

“ Don't get married. And stay in school. I went to college looking for a wife. I wanted what my mom and dad had. A happy little house, where everyone got along. ... The summer after my freshman year, I had the opportunity to move to Florida with my two best friends from high school. I always intended to go back to college.”

—John Hall, Vancouver, utility contractor

How do you plan to spend your 40th birthday?

“ It's on Oct. 4. I'm going to throw my own party, with black balloons, tombstones around the yard, and I'm going to come as the Grim Reaper. It's not too soon to get the Halloween decorations out, and if I approach it that way, maybe everybody will lay off a bit.”

—Roxanne Martin, Ridgefield, homemaker

“ I'm hoping to go with my best friend, who also turns 40 this year, on a 10-day Mediterranean cruise. I've known her since junior high school. ... It's someplace that's romantic and adventurous, and it's a place that neither one of us has been.”

—Misha Piccola, Vancouver, supply planner for Hewlett-Packard Co.

“ It's going to be a quiet thing, with friends and family and as little emphasis on the 40 as possible.”

—John Hall, Vancouver, utility contractor

“ My family is notorious for milestone birthdays, with the bedpans and the jokes. ... I've been in on the fun as much as anyone. I seem to be hitting these milestones, and it doesn't seem to be bothering me.”

—Steve Kuyatt, Vancouver, public relations and marketing specialist