

# MIDLIFE calm

An Alternative to  
Midlife Crisis

Krista M. Powers



***Midlife Calm: An Alternative to Midlife Crisis***

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# Contents

Intention and Dedication

Chapter One	<i>1</i>
Chapter Two	<i>9</i>
Chapter Three	<i>15</i>
Chapter Four	<i>25</i>
Chapter Five	<i>41</i>
Chapter Six	<i>47</i>
Chapter Seven	<i>69</i>
Chapter Eight	<i>89</i>
Chapter Nine	<i>105</i>

Epilogue and Call to Action *115*

Acknowledgements *117*

Notes *120*

About Krista *126*



## **Intention and Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the part of each of us bubbling up from within. It was written with the intention of creating curiosity in individuals, sparking conversations, cultivating new paradigms, shifting cultural norms, and healing our world. All of which happens one human at a time.

And to my Godchildren – Nathan, Theo, Paul, and Skylar – this book is also dedicated to you. Create an entire life of calm, you precious beings!

*“You are important and powerful.”* I often share this sentiment with the people in my life. Individually and as a community, we radiate when we embrace this simple and beautiful truth. As the people who preordered and breathed life into this book, please also receive this message. To every VATRON, *you* are important and powerful. Namaste.

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I quit my job.

I was a single, 42-year-old woman and I quit my job. I should note, it was an awesome job.

The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden was ranked number one in the country. This honor was not only because of a famous hippopotamus named Fiona. It was also because our team was innovative, creative, willing-to-fail, willing-to-get up and try again. We were a powerhouse. Our innovations within animal habitats and botanical beauty brought sustainability, conservation, community engagement, and investment to levels beyond our wildest imaginings.<sup>1-6</sup>

The zoo was a wickedly fun place to work. During my first week, I sat in my office giggling as the calls of gibbons interrupted my thoughts. I especially remember the sense of confusion I felt the first time I heard an elephant trumpet. Being born and bred in the Midwest, my brain took a moment to register that the noises in my immediate vicinity could be coming from elephants, of all things. I popped my head into my colleague's office to ask, "*Did you hear that?*" Her eyes lit up as a grin spread across her face. She was vicariously re-experiencing her own first time in my shoes.

The job encouraged walks throughout the campus. I would often meander across the zoo to sit with the manatees. From

the childhood moment I encountered these gentle giants in the wild on the docks near my grandparent's condo in Florida, they became my immediate and enduring favorite animal. Our facility at the zoo was one of only two manatee rehabilitation sanctuaries in the country outside of Florida.<sup>7</sup> As an employee, I could visit whenever I wanted.

While manatees fill me with peace, joy, and love, birds are the exact opposite. They elicit stress, chaos, and fear. The roots run deep. I was fourteen when a bird found its way into our house through a disconnected dryer vent. It ended up in my bedroom as I was slowly waking from a restful sleep. Even today, the sound of its wings flapping around my head is real and immediate. Birds simply terrify me. The unpredictable swooping! The pointy beaks! No thank you!

When my beloved colleagues at the zoo heard of my ornithophobia, they immediately created an opportunity for me to work with Bernard, the “sweet and loving vulture.” The common grackle that terrorized me as teenager was bad enough. To this day, I can barely handle the flitty nature of sparrows. So, a *vulture*? I was a hard “No!” Absolutely not.

Yet, with ample encouragement and reassurance from colleagues, and some deep breaths to ground myself, I mustered the courage and accepted the invitation to help train Bernard. The goal was to expose him to people other than his trainers in preparation for his debut in the Wings of Wonder show. On a crisp February morning, Bernard swooped through the stadium seating to snatch a piece of dead mouse from a little tin in my hand. The animal enrichment went well – both times.

Being part of the zoo team was nothing short of magical. It was a lush oasis in the city's urban core, filled to the brim with exotic animals. Inspiration flowed freely. I would walk through the tulips, delighting in the awe of children as they had up-close encounters

with African painted dogs, lions, giraffes, and flamingos. Even during the hot, sticky summer months, when kids are prone to arm-thrashing breakdowns, there was something magical about the place. It seemed to radiate imagination, creativity, and joy. The work was meaningful, moving, and fun. It stretched my limits, soothed my soul, and brought me great joy. Yet, I decided to quit. Although I had taken several calculated risks in my life, this was by far the most dramatic.



Perhaps we should go back to the beginning.

After earning my graduate degree, doors opened. I joined the United Way team in Cincinnati, Ohio. Though I had plenty of jobs before graduate school, this felt like starting a grown-up career for the first time. I was creating a home and community for myself. After a short tenure with United Way, I was courted by and invited to support an up-and-coming nonprofit. I had invested hours into my Covington, Kentucky community, and they took notice. I became a team of one. The board I reported directly to had a big vision: eradicating generational poverty in the region. It was a boost to my ego and bank account. And I was fully invested...for all of sixteen months.

There were challenges working alone. Meanwhile, my inner voice was struggling to get my attention. After some time, I finally noticed. Soon thereafter, I landed a position at a small nonprofit whose mission was to help people become the best version of themselves. During my interview, I equated fundraising to

friend-raising. That resonated with the founder, who gave me a chance. The experience opened a new world to me. Those were full and fruitful years. The organization grew from five employees to over a dozen. We were a real, unified team, and I was growing as much personally as I was professionally. At thirty, I got married with the love and support of my colleagues.

After several years, I felt it was time to move along. The nudge from within was getting louder and more persistent. I stepped into a lifelong passion and joined The Alzheimer's Association of Greater Cincinnati. Aging, death, and dying with dignity is deeply meaningful to me. I learned so much there, like what it meant to be fiercely committed to a mission. I also learned how to engage and empower people to be part of the change so desperately needed in the world. I had never felt so creative, or so much like a leader among leaders. Lifelong friendships were created during this season of life. We honored one another's gifts, connected deeply, and asked for support when we needed it.

Then – you guessed it – I got antsy there, too. Sure, I had a few years under my belt, yet my lifelong commitment to community and systemic change shifted. My next desire was to roll up my sleeves and return to direct care work. Soon I found a gem of a job at a continuum-of-care community. I was working in the same universe of aging issues, but in a more immediate way. My title: Director of Mission Integration and Spiritual Care. For me, it could not get any better than focusing on mission and spiritual health.

However, if you are not aware, the healthcare system in the United States is broken, and especially so for the aging population. We did our best to foster person-centered care. I was even sent on an all-expenses-paid pilgrimage to Italy to connect with the teachings of saints who served the aging community. But we were working against an entire industry, one that is emphatically *not* person-centered. As a human who leads with empathy and

thrives on serving others, it was soul-sucking and debilitating. Or at least that is what I allowed it to do to me. After only two years, I was exhausted and severely unhealthy. That is when I found my way to the Cincinnati Zoo.



I was born in the space between Generation X and millennial. Generational hair-splitting has deemed me a “xennial,” which refers to a supposed micro-generation born between 1977 and 1985. Millennials are projected to have twelve jobs in their lifetime.

I had been with six organizations in a timespan that represented a third of my working years. With each new job, my tenure got shorter and shorter. It was the opposite of the societal norm.

My inner script sounded something like this:

*This is not fulfilling me.*

*I want to try something else.*

*I am more interested in serving the aging population.*

*I love community and systemic-level change.*

*I need to be in the trenches to really make a difference.*

And so on. There was always a reason to move on to the next thing.

Unbeknownst to me, I was approaching my midlife calm. I was getting closer to insights into my authentic truths, clarity about

what I was avoiding, and self-trust. Jumping from one job to another was not a midlife crisis. Though it may have appeared to be chaotic, it was simply my unique path. My truth was bubbling up. I was acting from the drive towards real calm. Soon that inner knowing would drown out the societal expectations I had internalized throughout my life, willingly and consciously or not. My true inner voice had been getting louder and stronger all along. It caused me to shift until I arrived at a place where I could no longer see anything except the possibility of calm. And I wanted that calm desperately. I was willing to risk everything. So, without a plan, I quit my job.

It was the summer of 2020, and the world was deep into the pandemic. I had been invited to co-chair the zoo's reopening committee. It was an enormous challenge. The heavy investment of time and energy simultaneously invigorated and exhausted me. Losing so many colleagues from being closed for ten weeks created opportunities to pivot. That word was thrown around a lot in 2020. My pivot found me in the elephant house in the wee hours of the morning, scooping poop, stuffing bales of hay into feeders, and bathing four of the largest of all land mammals.

After that, I would return to my home office to put in an additional eight hours of effort. The smell of the elephant house followed me home. Despite everything, I grew to love the cozy hours spent surrounded by books, travel photographs, and the rich green walls of my study that gradually turned into a proper home office.

Before the pandemic, the room had sat, woefully under-utilized, for over ten years. During those years I told both myself and others that one day I would be a consultant, assisting organizations with strategy, leadership development, and fundraising. But it all seemed far-off, part of some impossibly enchanted time of life where I could function without a reliable salary or benefits. The freedom of a consulting position attracted me, and I felt

confident that I would be successful. The clarity was always there. I told myself, however, I could not have that as a 42-year-old, single adult.

Then, one day, I was walking along the floodwall that separates Covington from Newport and it came to me. I was not intentionally searching or thinking or processing. I was not fretting about work or the future. I was simply walking. It was a happy addition to my daily routine, and a way to sort myself out from the seemingly endless onslaught of work. On that walk, a thought came from nowhere: be a life coach. Initially, it made me pause. Then a smile blossomed deep inside, flowed throughout me, and caused the corners of my lips to turn up. Yes! Again, the thought: be a life coach!

How had I never considered this before? When I began to float the idea around, those were the exact words my closest friends and family repeated back to me. For perhaps the first time, I was not seeking approval. It felt so aligned, grounded, inspired, and confident. So, I committed myself to long workdays of constructing a reopening plan for the zoo. After that, I invested additional hours into researching coaching and entrepreneurship. The momentum was powerful. It sustained me through long evening hours of training, strategizing, and mapping out a plan. All the while, my vision and intention were becoming clearer and clearer.

Then, suddenly, opportunities began appearing. I refinanced my home, secured a more affordable monthly mortgage, and got access to equity. I attended free virtual trainings with thought leaders in the world of coaching. And like so many other pandemic-stressed businesses, the zoo arrived at the difficult but prudent decision to have a second round of layoffs in the summer of 2020. They offered voluntary separation packages, and I took the opportunity to depart with as much grace as I could muster.

Just like that, I was on a path to pursue a long, lingering dream that had been incubating over the countless miles I walked during the fateful pandemic year. Little did I know, I was embarking upon my Midlife Calm.

This book dives into the concept of midlife crisis and puts forth an alternative option – midlife calm. There are stories woven throughout to illuminate crisis and calm. There are questions that invite you into a place of curiosity and self-alignment. Perhaps it is time for you to embrace your Midlife Calm!



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