

HALFWAY  
THERE

*Lessons at Midlife*

ELIZABETH C. HAYNES

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This book is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identifying details of people described in this book have been altered to protect their privacy.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I started writing this book right after I fell off a health cliff, which lasted for more than four years and became one of the darkest periods of my rather traumatic life. I wrote it in spurts, in between varying levels of disability, in an effort to share lessons I thought I might be able to pass on to others. This was my fifth attempt at writing a book in more than a decade, but I knew it was the one I was finally meant to share.

When I was a schoolteacher for a brief period around age thirty, I found my favorite part of the job was relating to my students and sharing in their life struggles. Anything they'd experienced, I'd probably experienced too. And it was in this shared knowing that I felt the most like myself and like I was living an authentic life. I was able to use my hardships and trauma to help others, and I got my first glimpse of meaning for my existence when, previously, there had seemed to be none.

Many of my early writings were emotional vomits penned from a spiral of negativity and pain. This book was created in a different spirit—one of positivity,

growth, and understanding. I wasn't able to get there without first getting very sick, and I am grateful for my health challenges (with my hindsight goggles, of course!) because they finally helped me make that shift. I often talk about how we are all on a journey that sometimes doesn't make sense until later, and this book finally gives some meaning to mine.

Thank you for your purchase, and I hope you enjoy my little take on life. These are my most personal stories and I tell them because I think others may see themselves in my experiences and perhaps will feel more empowered to embrace their life as it is—not as it could be, or as it might be. Today is all there is, and there is only one version of us out there. Embrace every day.

## MOMENTS

I feel like life is a series of moments, rather than one continuous stream of consciousness that snakes around boulders and over rocks, moving seamlessly down the way. Right now, my moment finds me sitting in the morning light with the sun streaming through my window. It hits the top of my dark wooden desk and reflects brightly toward me in a way that causes me to squint. Everything is quiet except for the occasional singing bird and the low whirr of cars that are speeding down a nearby highway.

I look up from my work to observe an older gentleman walking his dog under the naked winter trees outside my window. Behind me, I listen as my Maine Coon kitty darts around the apartment in his usual post-breakfast mania and my elderly white and orange one settles back down to sleep.

It's just another moment in my life and it will be gone as quickly as it came. I'll get up from my work soon and move on to the next moment in my day, and whether or not this hour of my life registers in my brain for the

remainder of my time on earth is hard to say (although documenting it like this sure helps things along in that department). The fact is, we simply can't store all of our moments in easily accessible parts of our brains; this is why we have pictures and journals and people to remind us of what happened and when.



When I was in college, early in the fall semester of my freshman year, I remember lying on my bed alone one afternoon and losing myself in thought and observation as I looked out the open window just above me. The air was still warm from summer, and a faint, humid breeze whispered past my skin. I remember my reclusive roommate was out somewhere doing something or other (probably trying to avoid me) and my suitemates were roaming the campus or in their room studying quietly (I wasn't sure which). But there I was, stretched on top of the covers of my neatly made bed, staring up and out through the old window. It had panes that were crisscrossed by white wooden lines that were also speckled with peeling paint from decades long gone. I looked across the street at the neighboring dorm building, and then I looked upward at the flawlessly blue sky. And I decided to capture that moment in time, consciously, and to hold on to it forever.

I did this by saying to myself, as I surveyed every inch of my dorm room, something like:

*Elizabeth, remember this moment. You're young and you're in your first year of college. This moment is here now and pretty soon it won't be. And before you know*



*it, it'll be so far away, you'll wonder what happened to the time. But as you get older, you can always think to yourself, "I remember lying on that bed and capturing that one moment when I was nineteen years old ... and holding on to it, always."*

It was as if I were imprinting the words onto my soul that were necessary to immortalize that snapshot in time.

The funny thing is, it worked. That was twenty years ago and I still remember it in vivid detail like it was yesterday. I still remember the small room with the white walls and the tiny pedestal sink wedged between a pair of modest armoires and a bathroom door. I still remember the piece of gray carpet we'd picked up as a remnant from a local carpet store, and that we'd carted across town in one hundred-degree temperatures to use as a rug. I still remember my humble desk and chair, where I'd study and write my research papers, and where I'd use my bulky laptop to chat with my friend on this new thing called "America Online" (now known as "AOL"). I also still remember the long, rectangular, black and white TV with the tiny, six-inch screen and the travel handle, which I kept on the edge of the desk to watch at night sometimes, its long antenna reaching halfway to the ceiling and its dials letting me tune in to VHF or UHF.

Mostly, I still remember how it felt to be young and like the world was opening to me in a big horizon, like everything was brand new, like I was finally free, and like I had an entire life stretching beyond that dorm room, that window, that age of nineteen.

I must have been wise beyond my years because I somehow recognized that this moment, like all the others, would soon merge into all the rest. I also understood that I had the power to capture it and hold on to it if I so chose, simply by focusing intently and allowing everything to settle into a permanent place in my mind.



There have been many moments in my life between that one and now. But how many of them do I—or do we, in each of our unique lives—really remember? We always remember the important ones, like the day our cat died or the time we moved into an apartment with our new fiancé. We also remember those that weren't life-changing but were still special in some way, like the time we walked around the neighborhood with our best friend, drinking from a bottle of champagne we'd wrapped in a brown paper bag. But then we remember other seemingly insignificant moments, like the time a cashier at the grocery store was particularly chipper, or the time we were driving down the service road and saw a hawk sitting on the street sign.

I think most of our moments get stuck somewhere inside of us, even though there are millions upon millions of them that we experience in our lifetimes. Because often they can be coaxed out with a photograph, or with a reminder from someone else, or with a journal entry. Or, these days, they're beaten out of us by those "Memories" pop-ups on our social media feeds, which seem so often to be composed of things we'd like to forget.