



TALK

ANNA CAMPBELL -JONES TALKS

NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY OF LIFE OFTEN BRINGS A MIX OF TRIUMPHS AND TRIBULATIONS, AND FOR ANNA CAMPBELL-JONES, THIS JOURNEY HAS BEEN NO EXCEPTION.

A lot has happened in my life, both marvellous and extremely challenging and I am ever more positive about embracing midlife and whatever fate next decides to throw at me. At 55 I am firmly in my middle age and I have never felt better, physically and emotionally. I believe there is something wonderful that happens to women as they mature, we get better at understanding ourselves and the world around us. Lucy Worsley described it wonderfully when talking about the success Agatha Christie found in mid life, negotiating her own contracts and buying a house in her own name, unimaginable in that era, that she was 'coming into her power'. This is a phrase which keeps coming back to me as I face the usual daily challenges whilst feeling so much less stressed and anxious about them than a younger me would have.

As a younger adult I worked incredibly hard to progress up the career ladder of the London commercial interiors scene, very nearly burning myself out with ridiculously long hours and feeling an immense burden of personal responsibility for the projects I was running. I had always hoped to become a mother and after I became pregnant I thought that starting a family might also free me from this near constant anxiety.

My then boss offered to demote me in exchange for working 'normal' hours. I was struggling with undiagnosed post natal depression and I was overwhelmed by the idea of trying to carry on working as I had before and the much more significant responsibility of looking after my beautiful baby. My then husband and I made a big decision, we decided to move back to Scotland where his employer had an office, and we would be able to afford for me to focus on bringing up our children.

Even though I love Glasgow and had studied at GSA, I was not prepared for the shock of leaving my hometown, my friends, my family and my high flying career. I felt cast adrift, lonely and unsupported and I did not seek help for my state of mind, instead

starting to work at GSA part time and starting my residential interiors business, both in such a way that I could still focus primarily on parenting. I had another baby two years later and I just carried on, distracting myself by being busy. I made some amazing friends through the children and they were a lifeline. We were able to talk frankly to each other as pre-professional women who had variously adjusted our career expectations and at the same time absolutely adored being parents. I eventually found the courage to admit that I needed help, the GP put me on antidepressants which were a useful sticking plaster, feeling I didn't have time to indulge myself with the time and expense of talking therapy, until I gradually re-found my sense of self.

I carried on dashing about for the kids, working two jobs, trying remotely to support my mum in her struggles looking after my ailing father whilst slipping into the traditional role of keeping house, what would my firebrand feminist younger self have thought?!

Then my 40s hit: my marriage unexpectedly ended, my business partner and I parted ways, I had financial struggles, a new 5 year relationship stopped for no reason I could understand, both of my parents died in quick succession and my boys became adults. I had a breakdown in the immediate aftermath of my divorce but I chose to survive, as the saying goes, I made lemonade from all those lemons!

This time I took a different approach, failed attempts at marriage guidance counselling had actually shown me the value of talking things through with a professional. I started seeing a therapist regularly, she helped me to reframe how I looked at all aspects of my life, she taught me that looking after myself was truly the best way of making sure you can look after those around you. I don't currently see her but I take great comfort knowing that I can dip in and out when I need a mental health MOT.

With her help I have learned to relish the positive things in life, however small they are, and I no longer cope with problems by barging belligerently through them. I give myself time to think, I journal from time to time to keep myself honest with myself, I do a LOT of pilates, I read voraciously, I do needlepoint, I dance, I eat mostly plant based home prepared food and I only drink occasionally. I have a group of female friends that I love and cherish, we are all so different but we are all discovering this incredible power that can come in later life. I am happily single and have healthy mutually nurturing relationships with my family and friends who accept me for all my eccentricities. I have learned to say yes or no to things for considered reasons. I try not to think too far into the future as I have learned that you can never predict what curve balls are coming, I aim to be authentic in all aspects of my life and I believe this is the best safety net in times of trouble and the best strategy when trying something new that might have previously felt scary - like going on TV or starting my own brand!

It may have taken me a long time to get to this point, my current contentedness is hard won and still requires work. I have no regrets because I have learned that whatever you experience makes you you. Heartbreak and loss have only sharpened my appetite for happiness.

I care about people and the world very much but my 50s is the decade of not giving a damn what people think, I intend to get the most possible out of the rest of my life, to keep learning, loving and most importantly having fun.

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