Maria Shriver's
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Hope and Meaning for a Time Such as This

13 Changes I've Made in the Year Leading up to My 50th Birthday

The best part? They're things *all* of us can do to find more meaning and joy in our lives, no matter our age.

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Radically Reframing Aging Architects of Change

My mom's 50th birthday was a real doozy.

By the time she arrived at that milestone, she'd gone back to school after staying home to raise two feisty daughters. She ran PTA meetings and did Jazzercise six days a week—all while caring for my sick Nana. She could rock a pair of leather pants, went to church, and liked sneaking cigarettes. She could be both a supportive friend and hilarious gossip.

Mom was, and still is, a woman bursting with spitfire personality and character. That's why, at her 50th birthday lunch, she fell apart when her friends gifted her…a porcelain tureen.

Was it for soup? Stews? Who knows. What matters is the tureen made her feel fussy, old, and about to lose her teeth. This was the late 90s; not 18th century France. So, Mom cried. She felt unseen, despite all she did and gave and felt. She assumed her friends misunderstood her and accepted this as truth. Mom didn't pause to accurately see, and celebrate, all she'd become by 50.

Cut to me, six months from *my* 50th, and I still think about how one dumb dish could make a woman feel. So, I decided to make some proactive changes to my life ahead of my big day. This way, I could step into the next few decades with agency—aware of who I am and how I can age on my terms. By making a few little tweaks to my heart, schedule, relationships, and more, I can relax my expectations of others while giving my best to those who need me—including myself.

Turning 50 isn't about looking like "The New 30" or making this chapter my finest. Too much pressure. I'm simply gunning for joy, laughter, and peace—and the changes below are a head start.

The obvious bonus is that on my birthday, whether I get random tableware or am taken for a Michelin-star dinner, I'll feel gratitude and ease. I'll have already filled myself up with my own sense of self-awareness and love.

Everything else is gravy—though, I'll be honest, hopefully not in a tureen.

1. I actively search for happiness.

Everyone's girl-crush Amy Poehler has said on a few podcasts that in her 50s, she "makes room for joy because it doesn't come as naturally as when you're young." I love this. So I, too, began making joy-room by watching stimulating podcasts instead of depressing TV news. I climb into bed at 7 pm with the thermostat set to 68 degrees, and text Bigfoot videos to my son. I also create more "firsts," since they happen less organically. Just this week, I launched a Facebook page called "Chapter 2" to support divorced women with health issues—a space to gather, help, and gripe. After 50 years, risks feel less risky; the worst that can happen is I'll learn from mistakes.

2. I've established a spiritual practice.

After years of exploring different interpretations of God, I've finally embraced a faith that resonates with me. And at my age, I can look back at how God's hand has gently guided my life. I feel honored to serve him as he continues to demonstrate and teach me grace and love. I highly suggest choosing a belief system that prioritizes prayer, forgiveness, and loving others with a full heart. Polishing your values and serving a power greater than you is humbling and reassuring.

3. I remind myself that rejection isn't abandonment.

By 50, we've all faced rejection, whether it's from partners, employers, family members, or friends. I typically internalize a kick in the teeth with shame and sometimes guilt—and end up feeling abandoned. I used to see neglect as the period at the end of a story, whereas I now view it as a bridge to the next part of a song. Rejection also teaches discernment and can be a cautionary tale.

4. I tell people how I *really* am.

When the phone rings or I'm at the store and someone asks how I am, I no longer answer with a pat, "Great! And you?" I honestly tell them how I am—yes, really. Whether that's downright exhausted, good but busy, furious at my ex-husband, or proud of my son. Candidness leads to deeper connections, more laughs, and real conversation starters. Afterward, we've covered enough ground to follow-up with a text that references the podcast advice, real estate tip, or YouTube video that comes up—which continues what could have been a brief, bland greeting.

5. I look forward to love in all forms.

Stats say that by age 55, 46 percent of us have been divorced at least once and 12 percent are widowed. Grieving these losses is traumatic, but being alone can also be a chance to rediscover who you are after sharing a hivemind. I've learned to expand my notion of love, and I'm not alone. I've read about girlfriends raising kids in a shared house or neighborhood and colleagues moving to a gorgeous compound to launch a company. My best guy friend and I talk about buying a duplex, so we can enjoy our friendship-love rather than deal with dating apps. Love should bring fun, nurturing, compassion, and safety. Whatever this looks like to you is what your heart needs.

6. I've audited my friend group.

Editing your friends down to those who understand your worth, and spending time with those who are most aligned with what you want for the next half of your life, is key as we age. We've been on this earth long enough to spot a true companion. Our bodies are also changing, so empathetic friends trump wingmen from your 20s. We need friends who know and can love us through transitions—from menopause to losing a parent. Who do you want to grow old with?

7. I've accepted that life won't go the way I expected.

Remember the working-mom-two-kids-picket-fence-you-can-have-it-all fable that so many of us believed? By 50, we know it's a myth that if we do everything right, we'll remain gainfully employed, happily married, our kids will go to the best schools, our home will look like a magazine layout, and it will never rain on vacation. The good news is that half a century has prepared us for all kinds of change. My role as a parent, friend, sister, child, and partner has evolved. I admittedly roll like a square but try to keep it moving.

8. I'm learning a new life purpose.

I recently began a guided journal called ***Living Fearless*** that teaches you how to get to the core of who God created you to be, before life's bumps and bruises. Then, you take what you've learned and fold it into new projects, your everyday attitude, and your overall heart posture. The exercises showed me that I'd forgotten I'm not just driven and maternal but also supportive, empathetic, and reflective—traits that got lost in 50 years of chaotic shuffle. Now, I'm taking time to learn how I've always been.

9. I've made enough, enough.

Bandwidth shrinks with age, and this is a good thing. I take a pause first, then try to worry less about what others think, not to dissect everything I say and feel, and move on faster from frustrations. At 50, I've also stopped tiptoeing around bullies. My nervous system is so relieved.

10. I've pulled back on self help.

I love a good self-help book, but how many are collecting dust on your nightstand, too? Do you really need a stranger to tell you how to love, organize, and become less anxious—or should you trust yourself a bit more? For me, 50 ushers in greater self-acceptance and trust. Wisdom. I prefer advice from self-reflection, spirituality, loved ones, experience, and a therapist who knows me.

11. I'm good with feeling my age.

I never thought that in 2025, I'd need backup plans in case I aged-out of an industry, relationships, and trends—yet here I am. Agism is still a problem, especially for women. But once you accept that change is inevitable, you can self-reinvent by offering the world your most honest, of-the-moment self instead of trying to compete with younger social media stars or boss babes. Feeling your age is *not* a bad thing. Style your gray hair and trade the spin bike for Pilates. Oh, and try a midlife, hormone-savvy diet—you'll get further than bio-hacking it like the boys.

12. I've stopped caring about other people's "better luck."

I used to wonder how certain friends and even strangers had more money, thinner thighs, bigger families, nicer homes—as I struggled with cranky bosses, health issues, infertility, and divorce. By 50, I've seen enough hardship to know that *nobody* escapes difficulties and sometimes, there are no answers to why. I don't relish the schadenfreude, but I do wish I hadn't wasted all that time worrying about other people to see that winning, perfection, and an easy ride aren't real. And that when things get tough, to realize you're in good company.

13. I reminisce—but also look forward to an inclusive future.

Despite race, religion, financial status, politics, and all the other differentiators, there's room in the universe for every one of us. Build communities instead of a scarcity mindset. Dig into what matters to you, then invite others to join. Friends, family, nature, fulfilling work, good food, and honoring memories own my attention.

I recently read that certain fireflies are becoming extinct, and catching those sparkly bugs is a special memory for me—first, with my mom, then my son. They remind me of my past—but also to be present, chase what's beautiful, and look for the light where we can find it.

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