

9 things I wish I knew before I turned 50 - Health

This is 50

9 things I wish I knew before I turned 50: On marriage, friends and why you should floss

Annabelle Gurwitch TODAY contributor

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I like to say that the list of things I wish I knew before I turned 50 ranges from the practical to the *even more practical*. I say that because I've come to believe that making time for joy, something I used to put off, is as essential a part of my life now as having a really good pair of tweezers always handy.

Here are some more hard-won lessons.

Floss more.

This is not a metaphor. Really. I wish someone had said to me that the phrase "long in the tooth" isn't an abstract thing — your gums really do recede, a root canal is more painful than childbirth, and you don't even get all those good hormones afterwards.



courtesy of Annabelle Gurwitch

Then and now: The author with one of her oldest friends, award-winning actress Tonya Pinkins, as teenagers and today.

It takes a village.

Your male friends will evaporate into thin air when you start talking about hot flashes, and you might have lost touch with your girl friends — we're all so busy when our kids are little or we're working long hours and fighting for the

causes we're passionate about. Now is the time to put their numbers on speed dial and carve out time for them.



Annabelle Gurwitch

Annabelle and her husband.

Marvelous middling

Middles of marriages don't get a lot of attention: There is no section of any newspaper devoted to "still together or sticking it out!" If you're like me and have been married for more than a decade (we're in our 18th year), it's essential to value something you can only get after putting in so much time.

Like this: My husband buys me low fat soy milk for my coffee in the morning, even though he knows I prefer the sweetened kind. But he's looking out for my health, and that's such a great gesture of love I never would have even recognized when I was younger.

Blue Rider Press

Exercise dates.

Instead of meeting up with your girl friends (tip number two) for drinks and dinner, try an exercise date: It's cheaper and less fattening than a girl's night out.

I signed up for a cardio tennis class twice a week. We laugh and scream like Banshees when we miss a shot and our games have improved to boot. The funny thing is that my friends who I started the class with brought in other people, and though my original group has moved on, these new women and I have forged great friendships.

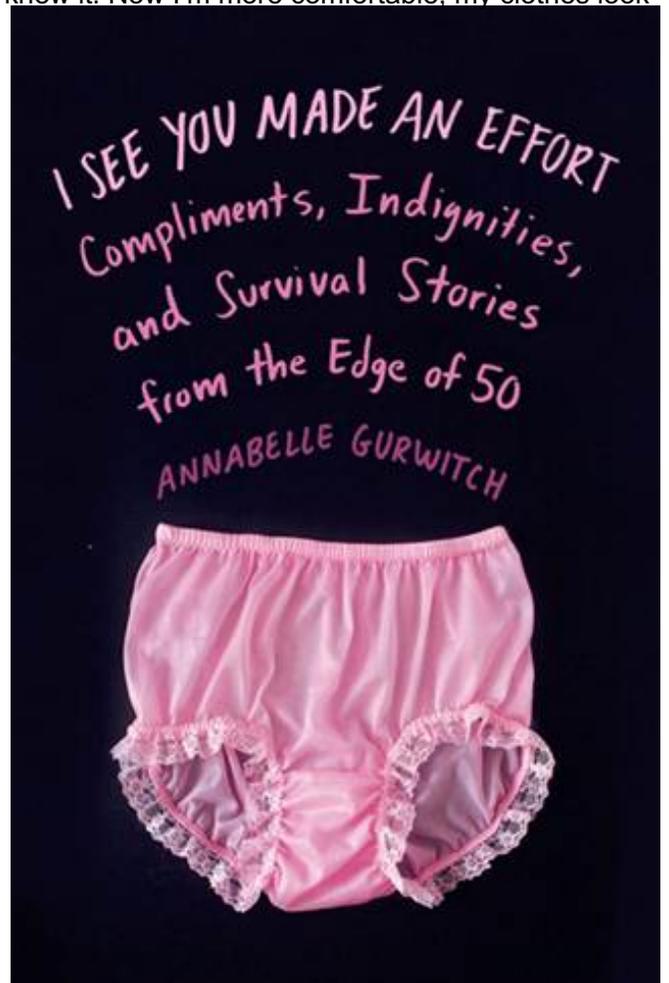
Get a good bra.

I will never forget seeing my grandmother Frances change in the group dressing rooms at Loehmann's discount dress store: Her brassiere looked like a cross between armadillo skin and an iron lung. It was like a hostage situation. We're living in a great time to be supported! Treat yourself to a bra fitting. I waited until I was 47 and I wish I had done it

when I was younger — I was wearing the wrong size and I never knew it. Now I'm more comfortable, my clothes look better, and when I take my shirt off it doesn't look like I'm undergoing tribal tattooing. Also, you think it will never happen to you but gravity is an equal opportunity law of nature.

Make peace with your mother.

Whether your mother has passed on, you are estranged from her, or you're begrudgingly attempting to teach her how to sign onto Skype with you, its time to put the past to rest. One day you'll be in your house and you'll catch sight of her in your mirror and think, "What's my mom doing at my house?" and you'll realize you're looking at your own image. Of course, it's not just that you might look like her; it's an inside job, as they say, and compassion gives you less worry lines than holding a grudge.



Courtesy of Annabelle Gurwitch

Annabelle and her son.

Cool it.

I was trying to remain *hip* to my son only to have him inform me that I'm not *cool* anymore. I'm not *dope* or *rad* or *sweet* or *chill* or *tight* or *gnarly* or *sick*, and I hate to break it to you, but you're probably not either. By the time you read

this, our kids will have come up with a new word, so I suggest just giving up. In fact, I dropped my son off at a concert recently and got ma'amed by a security guard and you know what? I kinda liked it.



Courtesy of Annabelle Gurwitch

Annabelle's choir, including "lots of amazing women of a certain age," performs at their winter concert to raise money for a charity in South Africa.

Go For the Joy

At 50 I decided to let nothing stand in the way of increasing my joy. I am a terrible singer but I love singing in a group and the choir I joined is so big, no one can hear me! All are spared my less-than-fabulous song stylings and I get to enjoy the community we have created. We sing traditional songs from Ghana and South Africa in the native languages — singing harmonies and learning new languages just happens to be good for the menopausal brain, and every Sunday is a massive injection of joy in my life.

Some things are worth retiring.

I'm ready to retire that phrase, "aging gracefully." It sounds too sedentary for us. Sure, I sometimes make old people sounds when I stand up, I've got some arthritis in my hands, and I compulsively collect moisturizer samples, but I'm happier, I'm less afraid of failure and I'm relishing life every day. I refuse to go gentle into that goodnight, which is why I prefer, "I'm aging with a vengeance."

So if you're nervous about approaching that half-century mark? I can't wait to greet you on the other side of fifty. Let's go for a hike.

Annabelle Gurwitch is the author of The New York Times bestseller ["I SEE YOU MADE AN EFFORT: compliments, indignities and survival stories on the edge of 50"](#) (Penguin). You can follow her [on Twitter here](#) and find out more about her work [on her website](#).

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