

# the menopausal

Mandated by the publisher to explore the issue of male midlife crisis, *Mary Singer* does her best. Anxious, and out of her zone of familiarity, she is pleasantly surprised by the wholehearted support she receives from DB's menfolk

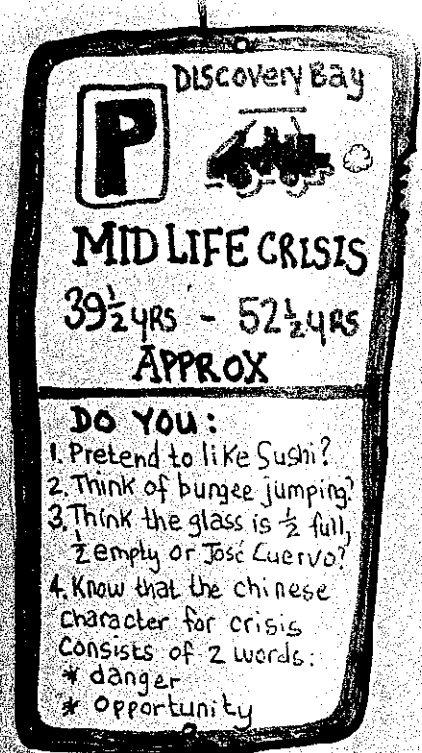
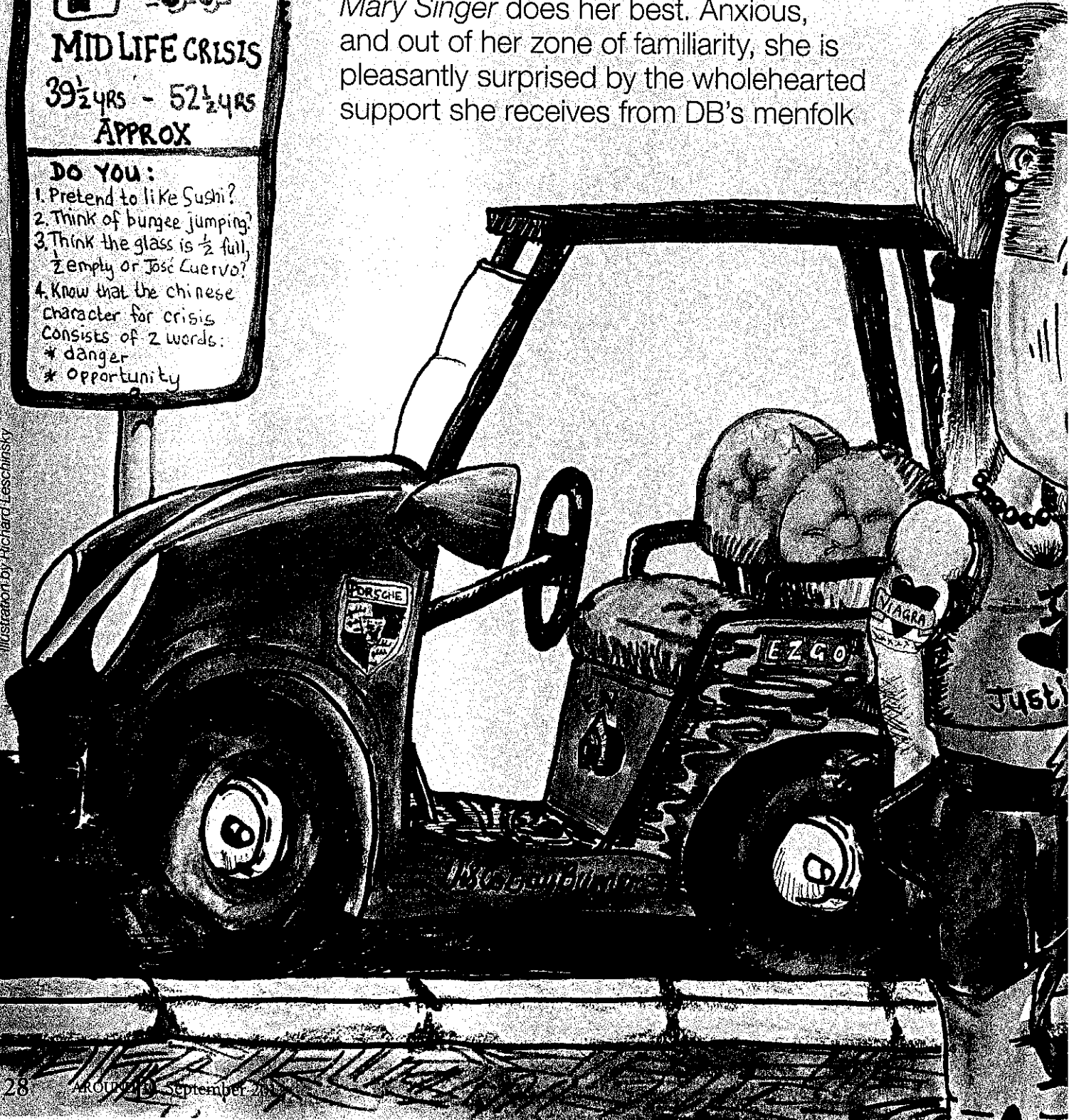


Illustration by Richard Leschinsky



# male

At our kids' rugby practice a while back, I approached my friend and fellow-writer, Al (not his real name), like I was told to approach a water buffalo in Africa – very slowly and with averted gaze. "I need your help, Al. Do you know anything about male midlife crisis? I have been told it normally starts with a red Porsche!"

"Sure," he replied with a grin. "But in DB there's no Porsche, obviously, so here's what you're gonna do. Go to the marina and check out the shiny new speedboats. Also, see who's zipping down the main road on those racing bicycles. You may also want to talk to some old musicians!" I then asked Al how he was enjoying his new, second-hand junk.

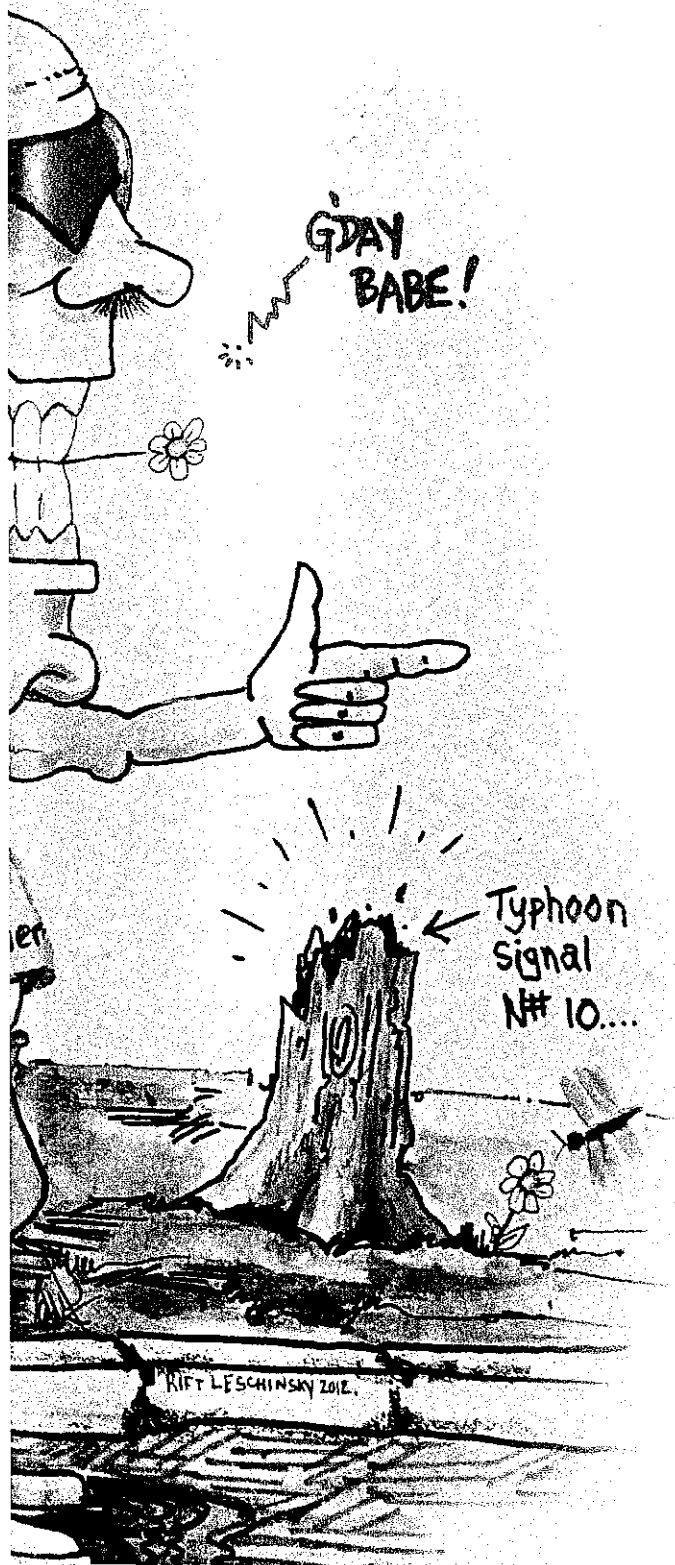
## It normally starts with a red Porsche

All this was, of course, part of a light-hearted conversation about what has for a long time been a difficult issue to talk about. The male in midlife crisis has long been parodied, but the issue is a serious concern. It is gratifying to see that nowadays, with the baby-boomer generation – and now some post-boomers, too – firmly ensconced in middle age, the subject is no longer the butt of jokes and no longer taboo. Midlife crisis is, rather, something that can be talked about and addressed like any other health-and-wellness issue; with care and concern – and maybe even a touch of kind-hearted humour. After all, laughter is the best medicine.

And who better to talk about this issue than the leader of the band. Says Greg Judd, "Actually the name Midlife Crisis was just a joke (as are many band names), perhaps to mask our insecurities as novice mid-30's DB musicians. The name certainly resonated with people." More so, perhaps, than the music, he adds. "For what it's worth, I think that the concept of a midlife crisis is a fiction of modern times, much like the terrible two's or even teenagers as a definitive group. Sadly, these fictions take on a life of their own and mask real problems, as well becoming justifications for bad behaviour. Stepping off my soapbox, Midlife Crisis the band wouldn't have happened without our partners, so it's definitely not the equivalent of a Porsche and a young girlfriend!"

Of course, there's nothing inherently bad in owning a shiny red Porsche, or training diligently, or drinking alcohol – or even in having a girlfriend who has only recently cleared the age of consent. But when these behaviours are leading in the direction of bankruptcy, neglect of work or loved ones, addiction, or broken families for instance, therein lie the real crises.

Whatever the stress triggers are, honest self-assessment is an important factor in recognising the need to seek support and/ or professional help. Often, that honest assessment first comes from friends or family and is ignored or denied. No one is saying that taking a look at oneself and acting on what you



## IN FOCUS

see, is easy – but it is achievable, especially if one is not afraid to ask for help.

### Honest self-assessment is achievable

Healthcare providers are all in agreement that the best approach to dealing with the physical/ emotional aspects associated with midlife (although it can occur at other times) is always a multi-faceted approach. It is about nurturing the mind, body and spirit. Everyone's journey will be different in this regard, and some solutions may be simple, some not: meditate, do a detox, learn to 'let go', take up running, make new friends, quit your job (find another), recommit to your marriage (or get an amicable divorce). Baby steps are a good start. There are plenty of trained professionals who can provide coaching and advice, whether the concerns are physical, nutritional, marital, sexual, financial, occupational, spiritual, or psychological.

A cognitive, mindful approach – understanding what is happening, and why, when one's behaviours are changing or becoming erratic is also a very good idea. Says Dr Richard Gee, from ReSource The Counselling Centre in Central, "The way I see it, [midlife crisis] is an interruption of the presumed pattern: being married, career, kids... then suddenly things become different. There can be doubts, crazy ideas, peculiar behaviours. This is the archetype midlife crisis. It may be mild or acute. It may be sparked by dissatisfaction with a relationship or a career." Dr Gee says also that the crisis may be gradual or sudden, triggered by the death of a loved one that results in the questioning of one's own purpose or existence, or perhaps by an affair that presents a contrast to the norm.

When should one seek help? "The sooner the better, especially for guys," says Dr Gee. "They have friends to joke and sound off with, but generally not to communicate deeply with. Ideally, there is an existing relationship [to a therapist], then they can come back to this trusted, safe place." Therapists all have their own approaches, and Dr Gee describes his-as 'exploratory and creative'. "My own past has mistakes, so I am unflappable. I invite expression – whatever comes out is fine," he says.

"The first step is to focus on emotions and feelings, then comes the plan – being aware of context, responsibilities and experiences, and not just changing things." Skills-building is a major part of the therapy; relationship skills, decision-making skills and communication skills are all examined. "This can be seen as a new chapter in the exploration of one's life," explains Dr Gee, adding that once



a plan is formulated and integrated, review is also necessary. "Without review, the cycle may repeat itself, because men don't talk."

While studies have shown that the cognitive approach is an effective therapy, there is also the issue of clinical depression, which can be part of a person's midlife crisis. In this case, medical intervention may also be an effective and necessary part of a multipronged approach.

Male or female, when the attendant issues and anxieties of the busy, productive lives of Lantau Island's 'boomers' start to pile up, it can be daunting if one is not prepared with a practical plan to deal with them. Fortunately, as I found out myself through writing this article, there are plenty of caring individuals in our midst who will offer help and support. All we need do is ask. We don't have to muddle through on our own. **B**

### Characteristics of midlife crisis

#### Individuals experience some of these feelings:

- A sense of searching for an undefined dream or goal
- A deep sense of remorse for goals not accomplished
- A fear of humiliation among more successful friends and colleagues
- A desire to achieve a feeling of youthfulness
- A need to spend more time alone or with peers

#### Men exhibit some of these behaviours:

- Abuse of alcohol
- Acquisition of unusual or expensive items, such as boats, sports cars, jewellery
- Depression
- Blaming themselves for their failures
- Paying special attention to physical appearance, such as covering baldness, wearing youthful designer clothes
- Entering relationships with younger people (sexual, professional, parental, etc.)
- Placing over importance on their children's ability to excel in school

You can contact Dr Richard Gee at ReSource The Counselling Centre via [www.resourcecounselling.org](http://www.resourcecounselling.org)



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