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Yes, I'm Letting Myself Go...And That's OK

"Where do you go when you let yourself go?"



I never wanted to be described as a woman who has "let herself go." The whispered insult is usually directed at a woman of a certain age who has become a slacker in the extreme sport of female maintenance, careless of mind or body. But sometime in my 60s, I began to wonder about this phrase. Where do you *go* when you let yourself go?

Today, in my 70s, my friends and I share many of the gifts of [longevity](#), one of which is more free time. Another is the freedom to "let go"—of the shoulds and the musts, the expectations that have tracked most of our family and work lives. We can leave them by the wayside—rather like 4-inch heels cast off for [comfortable shoes](#). What motivates us to let go of these burdens is both the luxury of this extra time and the urgency of a time limit. Mortality winks at us from our peripheral vision, as well as from the eyes of [our grandchildren](#).

We can even go from personal ambition to thinking about the legacy we might leave in the time we still have. As a newspaper columnist, most of my own adulthood was driven by deadlines. Leaving that privileged perch wasn't simple, but I leapt from a deadline-fixated work life to a mission-driven encore career, helping families talk about end-of-life wishes. A woman I know, when she turned 65, counted up the number of weekends she had left if she lived an average lifespan. This was not a depressing mathematical exercise. Her point was that we don't have time to waste. So we turn our attention to what matters, whether it's walking on the beach with a grandchild or working to save the environment that grandchild will inherit.

The years we've lived don't entirely free us of our share of responsibilities and worries. Or of our dreams. But we have learned that we can throw out the conventional checklist of shoulds and create our own list of coulds.

I am as much a work in progress in my 70s as I was in my 30s and 50s. Growing older, we are still...growing. So now when I hear, "She's let herself go," I answer: Good for her! Good for you! Let yourself go...and go for it.

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