

Got Midlife? Become an Amazing Gray!

An Interview with Maggie Rose Crane, San Diego based author of *Amazing Grays – A Woman’s Guide to Making the Next 50 the BEST 50 (Regardless of your hair color! FTA Press, 2008.*

As a leading edge baby boomer, and author of *Amazing Grays: A Woman’s Guide to Making the Next 50 the BEST 50 (Regardless of your hair color!)* Maggie Rose Crane has experienced many life passages common to her peers: college, marriage, divorce, single motherhood, career changes, and creating a blended family. As she approached midlife, she watched in astonishment as her skin began to lose its elasticity, and was mildly horrified when her tummy morphed into a permanent flotation device. Smile lines etched in deeper and she found it necessary to color her hair more often. When she made the decision to stop dyeing her hair, she came face-to-face with her fears about aging in a youth oriented culture. And so began her not-so-graceful quest to age mindfully.

Crane is a sought-after speaker who crisscrossed the country for over a decade speaking before thousands of women on topics including leadership, stress reduction and life balance. Currently, her message focuses on how to mindfully navigate midlife turbulence with wisdom, perspective and practice. She is also a guest editor for the Dove “Real Women/Real Beauty” website campaign. Born and raised in the Midwest and a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, Maggie currently resides in San Diego, CA.

1. I love the title of your book - tell us a little about it.

Amazing Grays – A Woman’s Guide to Making the Next 50 the BEST 50 (Regardless of your hair color!) draws on my journey through midlife. Balanced somewhere between a memoir and a how-to, my intention is to provide baby boomer women with insights, strategies and tips on how to traverse the rocky waters of midlife with grace and

accept the purposeful seasons of a woman's life. (And that it's okay to do a little kicking and screaming along the way!)

Amazing Grays is not just about reclaiming our zest for life - it's about helping women make the choices necessary to heal the past, let go of roles that no longer serve us, take accountability for our health and fitness, deal with menopause, hormones, graying hair and a changing body, and uncover what we value *now*. I also share my research on bio-identical hormones, which I have been using for almost 10 years.

While the book is a little about gray hair (I do give several options on how to grow it out if a woman wants to, as well as my process and some stories and photos from women who've already taken the plunge), it's mostly about gaining a fresh perspective. To me, the word "gray" is so much more about age than hair color. *(Although if you peeked at the roots of 90 % of boomer women, you'd find the gray hair, too!)*

By keeping the aspects of ourselves and our lives that reflect *who we really are*, and changing, transforming or dropping those that don't, we can create a life that better reflects the woman we've become. I encourage women to explore roots of a deeper kind. By redirecting our focus from our packaging to our *essence* we are better able to embrace the ongoing circle of life. It's through this work that we are blessed with the ability to reclaim our vitality and age with grace, gratitude and gusto!

2. What exactly is an "Amazing Gray"?

Amazing Grays are women of a certain age who know that they are in charge of their experience of the aging process - not society, not the media and certainly not their programming about what it means to get "old." Rather than dread the coming years, an Amazing Gray chooses to live her life full out and unencumbered by the past. It has nothing to do with hair color, unless you also happen to have gray hair!

3. What prompted you to write this book?

I had a life changing epiphany in a hair salon where it became clear I would never color my hair again. Allowing my hair to go gray was the precipitating event that threw me up against all my fears and expectations about aging in a culture obsessed with youth. While not every woman decides to go gray (nor should she) – the effects of aging eventually show up for everyone. Children leave home, careers wind down, bodies change, relationships evolve, values mature and the seeds of unrest begin to bloom.

After wrestling with my fears, compiling stacks of research and going on a 3-month silent retreat, it “came” to me. (I’m the first to admit it’s rarely silent inside ones head.) I realized that as a leading edge boomer, it might be useful to chronicle my experience and share what I had learned so that midlife women could have a guidebook as they traversed these rocky waters. It’s so empowering to know you’re not alone – and you’re not going crazy! I wanted to extend a hand to help women not only go through it, but also explore these purposeful changes and better appreciate the circle of life. I think many women will relate to my “not so graceful” journey and be happy to learn how they can smooth out their own passage. Mine is not an anti-aging message – it’s about embracing the beauty-full woman we are.

4. What do you feel sets this book apart from others in the same genre?

There is an assortment of books currently available about aging and midlife, many of them written by celebrities. While these are wonderful women, most of them live very privileged lives. They have notoriety, personal stylists, hairdressers, drivers, cooks, personal trainers and the money to purchase any product or treatment they desire. While I see no problem with that – most of us can’t relate.

Amazing Grays focuses on my experience as an everyday baby boomer woman maturing in a youth obsessed society. I’ve been married, divorced, a single parent, fired, remarried, dealt with a blended family, and survived several careers. I drive my own car, do my own hair and makeup, cook my own meals, live on a budget, pick out my own clothes and go to the gym. I believe these commonalities

will allow women to easily identify with my experience and learn from it. My intention is to share insights and strategies on how to age well, with style and grace - (allowing for a little kicking and screaming!) from an everyday woman's experience.

5. What are some of the fears midlife women experience as they age and how might they release those fears?

Underneath our confident exteriors I imagine many of us wonder...As I age will I continue to be loveable? Respected? Desirable? Can I still make a difference? Will I become invisible? Why are my looks so darned important? Is everyone this afraid of dying? Who am I now that I'm no longer of reproductive age? Am I doing what I came here to do? What do I want to do with the rest of my life? Is it almost over?

If we don't confront our fears head-on, they will run our life from backstage. I recommend that women take some time to brainstorm every fear, belief and expectation they have about aging and write it down. Then, by asking some simple questions - *Is this true? Who said so? How do I know this?* – they can begin to question the truth of these fears.

In my workshops, I encourage women to look at the fears they can DO something about, and determine an action they can take to alleviate it. The rest of their fears will most likely fall into the category I call "irrational" and are best dealt with by challenging the voices in our heads that keep insisting they are "true". There is no easy fix, but oftentimes just naming these fears can dilute some of their power. Don't believe everything you think!

The quality of our life is determined by what we pay attention to – so it's time for women to stop focusing on who they were and focus on the woman they've become. How can *this* woman make a difference in the world? How can we become spiritual midwives for a generation following in our footsteps? How can we give back in a way that feeds our soul?

6. What are you most passionate about and why?

I am most passionate about encouraging women to embrace the second half of life as a fresh start. By becoming an Amazing Gray (again, it has nothing to do with hair color!) I'm hoping that the gigantic pool of talent and experience that lies in the sweaty palms of baby boomer women can help to remedy many of the key issues facing our society today. We are at a pivotal moment in history and have an opportunity to use our feminine perspective and wisdom to become spiritual midwives to a society trying to give birth to a more loving way of being in the world.

So many of us have put our personal dreams on the backburner for any number of valid reasons. ALL of us have wisdom and experience we can bring to the table. Now is the time to reawaken slumbering dreams, uncover what we value and create the life you've always wanted. We can take steps to heal old wounds, forgive, and let go of the parts of ourselves that we've outgrown, summon our courage and move on to live mindfully and authentically as the amazing woman we've become – and have fun doing it! That in and of itself is a wonderful contribution.

7. What are you doing to learn or improve on your skills?

I share this not to toot my own horn, but to give midlife women an idea of what's possible in your 50s, 60s and beyond. So many of us believe that the best years are behind us. Not so! We are only limited by our beliefs of what's possible. I didn't write *Amazing Grays* until I was in my 50s.

In an effort to challenge my own fears and expectations about aging I'm trying new things and pushing through my fears. I had forgotten how much I love to dance, so I took a dance class. My teacher encouraged me to try out for the San Diego 'Senior Follies', a variety show featuring folks over 50. I was petrified, but tried out anyway and was offered a role as a dancer and...get ready for this – a showgirl! At 60! It was great fun and I learned some things about myself. Check out the *Amazing Grays* book trailer on my website and you will see that the lady in the red-feathered costume is...moi!

I also went to a spa that provides a challenge course. I walked unaided across a 30-foot telephone pole suspended 40 feet in the air. (Yes, I had a belay line so if I fell I wouldn't die!) It was terrifying - but so empowering. I was also harnessed and hoisted 40 feet into the air while holding on to a small rope, which, once I let go, allowed me to freefall and swing in huge arcs. I got to see how hanging on with fear was hard work – and just keeps me stuck in a standstill. Things tend to open up when you simply let go.

I'm participating with an organization that is providing micro-loans to women in Zambia so that they can purchase materials to put roofs on their mud homes, as well as provide meals for the children.

The hardest thing I've done was to take a 6-week online course in Social Marketing – so I can communicate with 21st Century tools. Frankly, I'd rather walk across the telephone pole!

8. What are you up to these days?

Through my speaking and workshops I am connecting with midlife women and opening up the conversation about what's going on with our bodies, our emotions, and the unrest many of us are feeling. I want to explore how we can reclaim our vitality, reawaken slumbering dreams and support one another in making decisions that allow us to live with grace, gratitude and gusto – and have some fun along the way!

9. What guidance might you give women on how they can live life to its fullest?

It's essential to face down ones fears about aging so that we don't draw to us the very thing we fear. Understand that changes in ones life are purposeful and allow us to go deeper into our own authentic nature. I find it takes more time and energy to resist life than to simply let go and live it.

By choosing to live mindfully, every moment is rich with experience. Stop indulging the compulsion to regret the past and fantasize about the future. We've all had the experience of living mind-/ess-ly. It's that feeling of wondering where the years went, how did we get here, even not remembering what we had for dinner last night!

Life is happening in the here and now. To get good at anything, we have to practice. It's essential to find a way to practice mind-*ful*-ness – meditation, centering prayer, yoga, tai chi, Qigong. Pick one and stick with it, no matter what your inner voices tell you. By living each moment as it happens, your life will feel fuller, longer and richer - no matter how the years add up.

10. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how long you've been writing?

Sure. I'm a leading edge baby boomer, doing my best to mature gracefully in a society that seems not to honor or appreciate the aging. I had actually never written anything more than a few speeches and workshops, until I was drawn to chronicle my bumpy journey through midlife. Previously, I spent nearly 10 years crisscrossing the country conducting leadership and life skills workshops for women. Exhaustion, menopause and the big 5-O all hit me at the same time and I experienced a total burnout. Wisely, I pressed the "pause" button on my life, stopped traveling, took on the administration of a home based business and created a space for whatever was next. Among other things – it was writing *Amazing Grays!*

11. What kind of research was involved in writing "Amazing Grays"?

I read a lot of books about aging, hormones, menopause and the like, and did a great deal of online research. I spoke with a couple of doctors. There seems to be a plethora of material on these topics today, but when I started this book there wasn't as much to draw on. I took care while writing my book to reference my resources. Not being a medical professional, I had to use more than my experience of sweaty nights, low libido and my expanding menopot to establish credibility.

12. How much input did you have into the design of your book cover?

The cover design was totally my choice, but I relied on a good cover designer to help me. Initially I didn't want to put my picture on the cover. I mean, who is Maggie Rose Crane to anybody but my family and friends? I thought only celebrities were entitled to have their mugs on the cover.

After experimenting with roses, various images and color designs, my graphic designer strongly encouraged me to use my photo on the cover. He thought I was a good example of what being an Amazing Gray was all about, wrinkles, crinkles and all. Seems he was right. I get a lot of compliments on the cover.

13. Are you a morning writer or a night writer?

Both. I find I write best in a quiet, undisturbed, uncluttered environment. I wrote my book in fits and starts – it was just important to start somewhere! During the last year, I arranged to housesit in another city for 6 weeks to get away from all distractions. I was able to finish most of the book at that time. Sometimes I found myself writing late into the night if I was on a roll. I would often just sit down in front of the computer and think about some aspect of my experience and begin to write about it. That often led to research, and more insight, and more writing.

14. Would you share with us how you came up with the idea for your book?

After kicking, screaming and sweating my way through menopause and the big 5-0, (and eventually coming to peace with it all) it occurred to me that I might be able to lend the baby boomer women coming up behind me a helping hand. Being a leading-edge baby boomer I'd didn't have a lot of modern role models or new information to draw upon. Needing answers, I read every book and article I could get my sweaty hands on, walked the walk, confronted my fears about aging, learned to laugh about it all and confirmed that what's inside

us is so much more beauty-full than the package that carries us. Sharing all that just seemed like the right thing to do. My intention is to give women a roadmap so that they might age with more grace (and humor) than I did.

15. Was it a light bulb moment or something that you thought about for a very long time?

It was kind of a soft light bulb moment. Writing a book was never on my list of “things to do”. The idea presented itself to me while I was on a 3-month silent spiritual retreat. (And, yes - it’s rarely silent inside ones head) My focus was on practicing mindfulness and allowing life to unfold. One day, while sitting quietly in a meadow, it occurred to me that I could put all my hard won lessons, insights and experiences about my journey through midlife into a book to help women who were just beginning their own journey. Of course, my inner voices immediately proclaimed that that was a *ridiculous* idea – but then, I’ve learned not to believe those inner voices!

16. How did you come up with the title?

I wrestled with this for a long time. In fact, this is a great lesson for all writers. My book was already at the printers titled: *Going Gray Gracefully: A Fresh Perspective* when another book was released called *Going Gray*. I panicked, got upset and eventually decided that the titles and focus of the two books were too similar to be published at the same time. Regrettably, I called the book back from the printers.

I hired a marketing specialist to help me. He pointed out that my book was much more dynamic than my original title suggested and didn’t suit it at all. He went so far as to suggest it was *good* that that other book had been published so I had the opportunity to change my title!

Together we hammered out the subtitle, “Making the Next 50 the BEST 50” but were stuck on coming up with the main title. One day, sitting at my desk – it just came to me...AMAZING GRAYS! It said

everything I intended. I also added the addendum (Regardless of your hair color!), as I didn't want women to think it was a book only for gray-haired women. "Gray" is a metaphor for aging, as well as a hair color. I rewrote some of my content to reflect the new focus and, in retrospect, am SO pleased that other book was published when it was. If not, I may have been stuck with that misleading title. So, don't be dismayed when things don't go as planned. It could turn out even better!

17. What message are you trying to get across to your readers with this book?

That there is still so much life to be lived! How we experience it is up to us. Unless we first consciously tackle our fears and limiting beliefs about aging, we're likely to make them our reality. We have the benefit of so much new information, but an unconscious belief trumps a fact every time.

Throughout the book, I provide women with the opportunity to ask themselves some practical questions in order to expose and discard their fears, challenge the beliefs that are keeping them stuck, discover what they value *now* and reawaken slumbering dreams and passions to create a life that reflects the woman they've become. (With a few laughs along the way). We CAN choose to age well. It's just that many of us forget to choose!

By redirecting our focus from our packaging to our *essence*, we can see an aging body in a new light. While our body certainly deserves respect and tender loving care, it's important to remember that it is not the essence of *who we are*.