

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was...**

Journalistic license is a wonderful little tool of writing, and has allowed me to adapt this powerful ditty (originally from the Bible) to suit my own purposes. When faced with the Knower of All Things (here is where I part ways with any religious connotations), there can only be one question. What expectations should we set for ourselves? What is the key to living happily ever after? How do we stop ourselves getting bored with our own lives?

And already that one question has tripled, and if further thought were allowed it would surely spawn a list of similarly confused queries. These were the questions I pondered this August when I received my first, ever official Scottish Qualification Certificate for my Standard Grade results (which I wished to accept delivery of about as much as I did a Tetanus vaccination).

I wish I could say that these grades were the reward for many laboured hours of strenuous revision, naturally begun months in advance, but to be honest it was more the result of frantic cramming sessions lasting until the early hours of the morning (Form IVs: this is not clever. Don't do it).

Nevertheless, my intellectual capability was judged and graded and presented to me in an acropolis of figures before my eyes, and I couldn't help but stare at them and think...is this it? It was such a let-down, an anti-climax, a dull sense of boredom where there should have been a rush of self pride... was this mediocrity and lack of genuine satisfaction in my accomplishments all that life had to offer?

And that's when realisation struck: I was having a mid-life crisis.

The mid-life crisis, for those who have not experienced it or have yet to witness the sheer embarrassment of your parents suffering one, is a point of emotional doubt and fragility for someone who has suddenly realised that their existence on earth is halfway expired. When reflecting on their life, they are disappointed and decide to radically change before it's too late. This can result in several peculiar and horrifying actions as they try to reject middle-age and recapture youth (hence the alarming number of fifty-year-old men driving around in slick sports cars).

Now, you may say, isn't this a touch premature for a girl who has not yet even reached twenty? Doesn't one have to be balding, in a dead-end job, or married, to have such sentiments? Where is all the blind optimism that we 'crazy teens' are meant to have? Somewhere, in the vacuum of our teen years, the fun has been sucked out and replaced by something far worse: premature middle-agedness.

The modern-day teenager has to contend with so many atrocities it is impossible to appropriate the blame for this new form of mid-teen crisis: the endless stream of exams, the expectations, the hormones that we have absolutely no control over, the reality that the rest of the world looks at us with disdain. In fact, with such a multitude of pressures, it's a wonder that anyone survives long enough to justify an actual mid-life crisis taking place somewhere between the ages of 35 and 45, or whenever it happens to be that a man starts to bald and his wife wonders why she dedicated her life to her children.

So, clearly we must do something to postpone the feeling that life isn't worth the hassle for teenagers. Does the answer lie in reducing the number of academic exams forced on pupils and encouraging them to bask in the lighter aspects of life, so that we live an easy, breezy existence and love every moment of it? Conversely, should there be more emphasis placed on personal achievements and academic brilliance, so that the product of these teenage years is an altogether more educated, more confident young person who proves more capable? Will that then, in turn, prevent or postpone the feelings of self-reproach that arise mid-life?

The problem here is that we have no one to direct these questions at. Adults, the universal solution to just about everything when you're under the age of seven, progressively lose their role as The Omniscient One the older that a child gets, and you find them searching for the same answers that you are. Come fourteen or so, a child will in fact believe that they are smarter than the average adult and any advice given by one is about as well-absorbed as the river Nile is by a very small handkerchief.

When we are faced with the problems in life, ranging from the tragically less important but radically more interesting social issues such as relationships, status, boys, to the annoyingly significant but numbingly boring complications of education, the future, and mortgages, the only person we can rely on is ourselves, hoping that the decisions we take will have the desired effect.

Perhaps the aspirations that society tells us we ought to achieve actually have no significance: what really matters are the goals we set ourselves. Perhaps all these mid-life, mid-teen crises stem from an insecurity that runs through us all: the shuddering thought that nothing you do will be good enough for the rest of the world. Perhaps we should release these tensions from our minds and embrace our individuality while ignoring the standard ideals of what an 'accomplishment' is. Managing to survive past infancy is a triumph in itself, is it not?

So, in the beginning, when the word was with God, perhaps the word was 'whatever' — whatever makes you happy.