

Navigating Midlife

By Stephanie Johnson



“For years Rita Golden Gelman felt she was living someone else’s life. She lived a privileged existence, attending glamorous parties and dining with celebrities. But none of it made her happy. Something was missing.

When her marriage falters Rita decides to seize the opportunity to live her dream – take off and see the world on her own, and on her own terms. Fifteen years later, she is still traveling.”

This publicity blurb on the back of a book entitled ‘*Tales of a Female Nomad – Living At Large in the World*’ caught my eye. It spoke to something in me and I was hooked. The book is a fascinating read. While I would not want to live the life that Rita so enthusiastically embraces, there is something about her story that speaks to me, and I think possibly to many other women in the middle of their life.

This incredible story of a women’s journey of discovery is more than simply a journal of physical discovery. It is one of emotional and spiritual discovery, of growth and of “relationship” – “relationship to self and others”. The honesty is raw and exciting, and something that is so easily lost in life, buried under responsibilities and society’s values.

Rita’s book sparked in me a yearning to understand more about my own life, my own unspoken wishes and dreams and my own values. My own life is rich and rewarding and yet sometimes I feel an urge to break out. A lot of my women friends, also in the middle of their lives, have made radical changes in their lives. Why?

This led me to another book. Isn’t synchronicity wonderful? “*Navigating Midlife, Women Becoming Themselves*” by Australian psychologist Robyn Vickers-Willis outlines the process of women’s transition from the first half to the second half of their lives. Here I found some answers to my questions, some exercises to help me understand my own process and some fascinating correlations to astrology!

Vickers-Willis states that women spend the first half of their lives aiming to achieve success according to society’s values. In other words we aim for a successful career, relationship and perhaps a family. She goes on to outline how women, particularly those growing up in the 1950s and 60s, often aim to conform to the wishes of loved ones and those around them. Consequently about the age of 35 many women start to question their lives. An urge for a life reflecting inner, rather than external values, starts to emerge thus triggering a process of transition. Vickers-Willis states that this transition period can take place anywhere from age 35 – 50.

Vickers-Willis likens the mid-life journey to that of migrants leaving their home country for a new land. Firstly the migrants realize that they want something different. They are unhappy with their homeland and believe that there is a better way of life. If they listen to these deep stirrings from within, then they will start to act. They gather information about such things as living conditions in other countries, immigration possibilities, opportunities for financial assistance and travel arrangements. They talk to friends. As this process unfolds, they start to make choices, realizing that some friends and family members will stay behind. If they continue the process, there is much soul-searching and many practical tasks. Homes and possessions are sorted through. Treasures are packed, while other things are discarded. Finally, the day comes when the migrants say good-bye to their familiar and loved homeland and loved ones.

Next comes the voyage. Migrants traveling to countries such as the US and Australia usually travel by sea. This part of the journey provides plenty of opportunity for reflection on memories of the past, and hopes for the future.

“The journey takes a long time. In the beginning listlessness comes over them and they spend much time lying on their bunks. They feel heaviness in their hearts. They feel like doing nothing. They rest as much as they. They also know they have to deal with day-to-day practicalities and so they attend to personal hygiene, cook some food and generally look after themselves and each other. They walk on the deck when they can, to get some exercise and fresh air. Some also tell stories of the old life. They support each other as they share their sadness.”

Finally there is the stepping onto a new land, the lack of familiarity with migration procedures and setting up a new home in a new country. The new migrants are faced with freedom, independence and the challenge of creating a new life.

To my way of thinking this correlates closely to the midlife transits in astrology. These generally occur from the ages of 37 – 47 in the following order:

- **Transiting Pluto square natal Pluto.** The current position of the planet Pluto is at a 90 degree angle to its position in the natal chart.
- **Transiting Neptune square natal Neptune.** Neptune is at 90 degrees to its position in the birth chart.
- **Transiting Uranus is in Opposition to natal Uranus.** Uranus is at 180 degrees to its position in the chart.

The first Pluto Square, or transiting Pluto square natal Pluto, signifies the first rumblings of a previously dormant emotional volcano. There begins a deep sense of personal unrest. Life may have been traumatic or calm before the first Pluto square transit. Either way, this transit brings with it a feeling of dissatisfaction together with a need to make changes. In

some cases we react rather strongly to this emerging recognition for a need to change. On the other hand some of us sit tight, feeling somewhat like a person holding on to a bucking bronco, determined to stay on for the ride. The key is really to go with the flow. Astrologer Lee Lehman states that Pluto represents the challenge of a “moment of truth” to those of us who experience these transits.¹ Lehman says Pluto transits herald uncomfortable circumstances that change us forever, circumstances that demand a response. We can respond through power manipulation, or we can face the truth of the situation. Lehman says that power is what happens in the absence of truth. Facing truths can be emotionally painful, but paradoxically often prove liberating in the long-term. The moment of truth in the middle of our lives is one that steers us away from the past, urges us to search for the truths of our midlife and move forward. Not an overnight feat!

In order to make these deep and long-lasting changes in our lives, we need time for contemplation. Hence the midlife transit of Neptune square Neptune. Neptune is a planet that subtly demands contemplation. This midlife transit asks us to reflect on the first half of our life. As a consequence we need to make time, to slow down. We cannot gaze into a pool of reflection if we are swimming rapidly in the water!

As astrologer Bill Tierney states: *“These transits (Neptune) don’t readily translate into dynamic situational events, at least not in any cut-and-dried way.... This Neptune phase describes the emotional discontentment of the mid-life years. Buried feelings and forgotten yearnings may now emerge from our unconscious depths, needing our nurturance and understanding. We should acknowledge them now, rather than further suppress or deny their existence. Life is telling us that we can no longer seek ideal security from sources out there in the world. It will have to come from within if it is to be trusted²*

There is no way to go but inside. We reflect deeply on the changes needed before making them. It is, therefore, important during this transit, to make sure that we create opportunities for rest and rumination. Symptoms of tiredness may be indications that we need to make room for our inner urge for quiet consideration.

Finally we need the impetus to make the changes in our lives. In astrological terms this comes from the Uranus opposition. Uranus is the planet of upheavals, usually prompted by a need for doing things differently, a need for change. Transiting Uranus opposite Uranus is a time when we feel restless. An urgent need for change emerges. We might reflect on our past achievements with a feeling of satisfaction, however; we are keen to move on to different or fresher pastures. Basically this is a time of readjustment when we start to incorporate more spiritual values and when we orient our lives towards our own inner feelings.

Not everyone experiences these transitory periods in the same order. The order of the transits varies according to different generations. The following is an approximate guide to the midlife transit process for people born in different decades:

1930 – late 1940s: Uranus opposition, Neptune square, Pluto square

Late 1940s - late 1951: Uranus opposition, Pluto square, Neptune square
 1951 – 1952: a brief period of Pluto square, Neptune Square, Uranus opposition,
 1952 – early 1960s: Pluto square, Uranus opposition, Neptune Square
 Early 1960s -: Pluto square, Neptune Square, Uranus Opposition

The order is not of great importance. In fact sometimes the varying cycles of the outer planets results in two of the midlife transits occurring in the same year. It is the actual process of midlife transition that is important. Each transit brings its own lesson in a unique way for each of us. These midlife transits are also affected by the other concurrent transits occurring at this time of our lives.

This was certainly the case for Rita and her travels. Rita’s book starts: *“1985. I am living someone else’s life. It’s a good life, filled with elegant restaurants, interesting people, and events like the Academy Awards and the Grammys. My husband of 24 years and I dine with celebrities, we see the latest movies before the rest of the world, and we’re invited to all the book parties in Los Angeles.”*

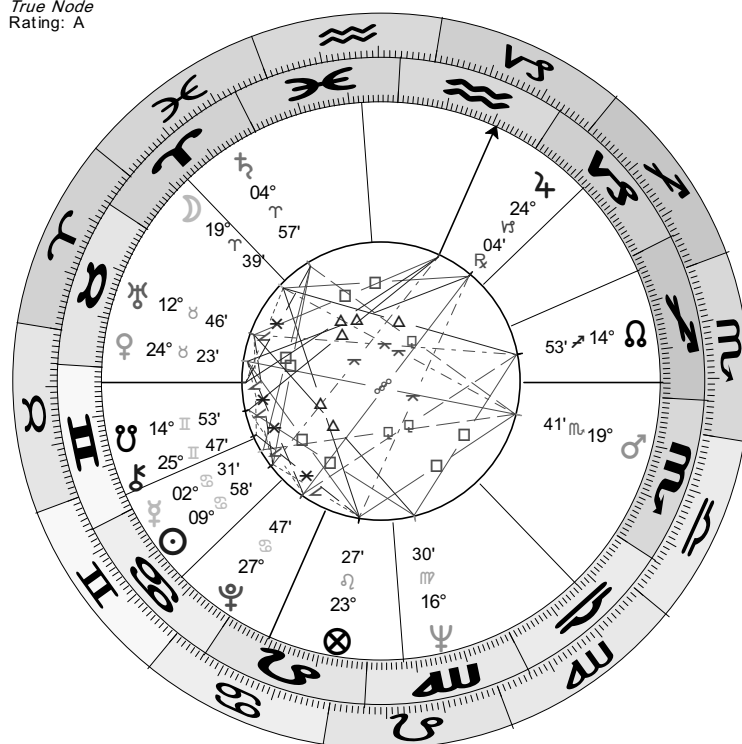
Rita’s midlife transits started at the end of 1977, about seven years before her dramatic life changes.³

With a Gemini Ascendant and its ruler Mercury conjunct her Sun, it is not surprising that Rita is a writer and journalist. It is also interesting to note that Mercury in Cancer, disposed by the Moon, has prompted a love of writing children’s books. Rita published

Rita Golden Gelman
 Female Chart
 2 Jul 1937
 2:00 am EST +5:00
 Bridgeport, CT
 41°N11°11" 073°W11°46"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node
 Rating: A

Compliments of:
 Seeing With Stars Astrolog:
 Stephanie Johnson
 PO Box 159 Stepney SA 5065
 Email: consults@esotech.com.au

her first children’s book in 1972. In 1976 she moved, with her family, to Los Angeles where she continued to write. One could surmise from her midlife transits that a sense of despondency and restlessness started about a year after her move to Los Angeles.



In her book, *“Tales of a Female Nomad”*, Rita tells us that the first conscious realization that she wanted to change the direction of her life was in 1980. She says: *“I first realized something was missing about five years ago when a woman wearing a floor-length muumuu and sandals sat next to me on an airplane. She told me she was in the business of booking sailing tours for captains around the world and was*

returning from the Mediterranean, the Adriatic and the Gulf of Mexico. As she was telling me about her trip, tears began streaming down my cheeks.”

Rita continues, telling us of her realization that somewhere in her life journey she had lost her dreams. She determines to change. At first, not wanting to lose her marriage, she studies anthropology in graduate school. It is interesting to note that 1980 falls in the middle of Rita's midlife transits and that she was experiencing transiting Pluto opposing her Moon. No wonder, she shed a few tears.

Prior to 1980, Rita had her Uranus opposition from November 1977 to August 1978. This coincided with the Neptune square from Christmas Day, 1977 to October 27, 1978. During this time she would have started to realize that one period of her life was coming to a close. Perhaps changes could not be instigated immediately because of other responsibilities. It is my personal experience that the discoveries made during the midlife transition are sometimes put on hold until responsibilities have been dealt with. For instance until children have become independent. In 1980, with transiting Pluto opposing her Aries Moon, Rita's need for freedom and independence would be intensifying, as she describes in the above story. It is also important to note Rita's natal chart. Anyone with an Aries Moon has a strong need for self-direction and physical challenges. If this urge has been suppressed in the first half of life, it is bound to surface during the midlife transition. In Rita's case the Moon is disposed by Mars in the 6th House. Therefore it is imperative that she feels in charge of her daily routine, free to set her own schedule. This would be difficult to do in a traditional family or marriage situation.

Rita's return to study was a healthy step in the right direction, but by 1983 when she enters her Pluto square Pluto phase, a sense of urgency would have surfaced and was not likely to disappear again.

By 1985 Rita is ready to travel, to re-discover her own dreams – no matter what the cost. It is also interesting to note, that, at this stage Rita has transiting Saturn opposing her natal 12th House Venus. (By the end of 1985, Saturn transits over her 7th House cusp). Venus is a powerful planet in Rita's chart. Despite the fact that it is in the 12th House, it is in the sign of Taurus. Transiting Saturn opposing the 12th House Venus heralds a time of endings, of challenging Rita's notions of relationship and her values. Her routine changes – to say the least! Rita also experiences transiting Neptune opposing her natal Mercury during 1985.

However, I think that transiting Jupiter conjuncting her MC probably speaks loudest about her urge to expand her horizons, change her life direction and seek new adventures. Jupiter is natively in the 9th House of journeys and culture and rules the 7th and 8th Houses, thus indicating changes in partnerships, joint finances and property. Her love of travel is surely a combination of her independent Moon in Aries and Jupiter in the 9th House of higher learning and travel. If it were not for the Aries Moon then I would have thought that Rita would prefer to travel with a partner, or friend. After all Jupiter is ruling the 7th and 8th Houses of intimacy, joint resources and marriage.

The exciting tales of Rita's travels are well told in her inspirational book, however; I also think that the most important lesson for me, and perhaps others, is the re-claiming of Rita's dreams. By ensuring that our daily lives reflect our values and dreams, we grow more joyful on our life's journey, rather than increasingly stale and possibly bitter.

In conclusion, we have much to gain by embracing our own, very personal, dreams and values. The process can be painful and frightening as was the case in the migrant's story, but the rewards are great. This wonderful quote from Rita's website sums up for me the rewards of incorporating the lessons of midlife transits in the second half of our lives.

"I lived in a two-family house, just down the street from Beardsley Park. That park was a major character in my childhood. In the summer in the park, we swam in the lake and waded in the brook; we caught grasshoppers to feed to the praying mantises we had caught the day before; we rolled down the grassy hills and we trapped lightning bugs in bottles at night. There was a zoo in the park, and I collected peacock feathers by putting chewing gum on the end of a long stick, sliding the stick through the square holes in the wire fence, and then pressing the gummed tip onto the molted feathers. That was the summer.

In the fall, we piled up the leaves into giant mounds and dived into them until we were buried. In the winter we sledged, built snowmen and forts, and had spectacular snowball fights in the park. And in the spring, we roller-skated, played hide-and-seek, and climbed trees.

*Today, when I'm writing books for children, the girl who leaped into piles of leaves, scared her parents by presenting them with frogs, and stomped in puddles just because they were there, is still very much a part of me. I'm over fifty now, and I'm still quite capable of leaping into leaf piles. I love the smell, the crackle, and all the memories that come to me when I'm over my head in autumn leaves."*⁴

References:

Golden Gelman, Rita: "Tales of a Female Nomad – Living At Large in the World" Bantam Books 2001

Vickers-Willis, Robyn: " Navigating Midlife – Women Becoming Themselves" Allen and Unwin 2002

Solar Fire v5.1 chart

(Footnotes)

¹ Learning with Lee CD series, Lesson 4 Pluto: The Moment of Truth

² Bill Tierney, "Dreams For Sale: Neptune Transits"

<http://www.innerself.com/Astrology/neptune.htm>

³ Rita is a warm and generous person. As such she readily supplied her birth data via email. She was born on 2nd July 1937, 2am Bridgeport CT 41N11.11 73W11.46 +5.00

⁴ <http://www.ritagoldengelman.com/kids.html>