

Mid-Life Crisis; You're Not Going To Live Forever

After my column last month describing LuAnn's – uh – "volatile" behavior in her struggle with menopause, she insisted that today's column be about my own mid-life crisis.

At first I was surprised by her assessment and denied that I was having any such thing, until she laid out the evidence for me.

A Mid-life crisis can be defined as: "A period of emotional turmoil that some people encounter - usually between their mid-30s and mid-50s - accompanied by a desire for change in their lives brought on by fears and anxieties about growing older."

It seems that in the last few years I:

- Grew tired of playing the slide trombone after 40 years and bought an electric piano to learn to play.
- Got rid of my practical car and bought one with a 340 horsepower Hemi engine
- Decided piano wasn't for me and bought a bass guitar to learn how to play
- Became SCUBA certified and made a dozen dives below 100 feet
- Decided I'd rather play upright bass than bass guitar and bought two of those
- Cut my hair to about ½" in length (it's disappearing on its own, anyway)
- Bought a valve marching baritone to learn to play
- Descended in a research submarine to a depth of 1000 feet
- Bought a slide trumpet (soprano trombone) to learn to play
- Got a motorcycle license and bought an 800cc bike

That last item on my list is the most telling – it happened just a couple of weeks ago. LuAnn is not real excited about this – she's a Transplant Coordinator at UIHC who gets a lot of her "parts" from motorcycle riders (she calls them "donorcycles").

To get my license I took the three-day Kirkwood course at their Iowa City location. My class had 12 students ranging from a 17-year old girl to a handful of old guys like me muddling through their own midlife crises. One of the guys looked like he was born on a Harley – long hair, earring, tattoos, boots with chains and a sleeveless t-shirt with cigarettes in the pocket.

Perversely, he was the only one who washed out our first morning on the bikes – he dumped his four times, the last time at speed. I could empathize – there's a lot to think about. All four arms and legs need to be doing something, often all at the same time.

For example, when approaching a stop sign your right foot is applying the rear brake, your right hand is backing off the throttle and applying the front brake, your left hand is depressing the clutch while your left foot is downshifting.

Forget just one of those things and nothing good happens.

I was so sure it would be easy to pass the course that I spent most of my two days on the bikes having fun instead of concentrating on the techniques. My instructors had to warn me a couple of times during the cornering exercises to stop grinding my foot pegs on the concrete (due to excessive speed and lean).

Despite my feeling pretty comfortable about my skills, I barely passed the riding tests. There is a series of them at the end of the third day, and if you get 20 demerits while performing them, you don't pass. I had 19.

Taking the Kirkwood course exempted me from the D.O.T. skills test but not the written one, which I took at the driver's license station. It turns out (oops!) that there are a few things in the D.O.T. test that are not covered in the Kirkwood course.

I didn't bother to read the D.O.T. manual, and missed 5 of the 25 questions. Had I missed one more, I would have failed the written test.

In summary, I came within one question and one demerit of failing both the written and skills tests, and I'm riding a 600 pound bike with an engine three times bigger than I'm used to. Give me your phone number and I'll call to warn you each time I'm on the loose.

On the positive side, I've already been invited to join a gang. The sense of danger and empowerment I feel is only slightly diminished by the fact that most of the gang members are computer programmers.

Anyway, I'm happy to report that I think I have passed my mid-life crisis, and I'm planning on settling into a monotonous life of dull consistency.

Right after I get my pilot's license.