

CANADA'S FIFTY PLUS NEWSMAGAZINE

Forever Young

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Become more spiritual in midlife



Crossword

By Anne Bokma

A mere 20 per cent of Canadians attend religious services regularly and almost 10,000 churches—a third of all faith-owned buildings—are expected to close in Canada in the next decade, according to the National Trust.

Have Canadians given up on belief?

Not at all. We may have deserted the pew but we still consider ourselves spiritual. In fact, 80 million North Americans (39 per cent of Canadians and 27 per cent of Americans) identify as spiritual-but-not-religious, making us the fastest-growing faith group in the western world.

Midlife is a time that's especially rich with the possibility for spiritual growth. Here's why:

1. We've experienced struggle: The spiritual author Thomas Moore says the great problem of our time is the loss of soul. There's evidence of this misery of the spirit all around us: one in four North American women takes a psychiatric medication and 35 per cent of people over 45 are chronically lonely. Divorce, health issues, grown children who have failed to launch, fractured friendships, career disappointments and failing parents all contribute to our despair. You can't get to midlife without suffering some kind of profound loss. Seeking solace in spiritual pursuits can help fortify us to deal with these losses.

2. We understand what really matters: We become more reflective as we age and often rethink some of the life choices we've made. We're more able to accept the great paradox of life—that we can experience pain and joy simultaneously. We gain the wisdom to know that people are more important than possessions and that making something meaningful of our lives is more important than making money.

3. We look inward for answers: We have the confidence to question—and often reject—the traditional religious ideas we were raised with. In my book, "My

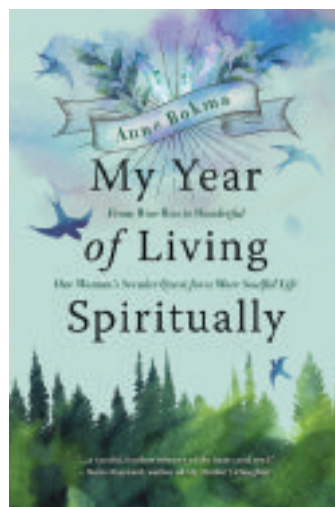
Year of Living Spiritually: From Woo-Woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life", I write about the challenges I faced leaving the fundamentalist Dutch Reformed Church of my youth (the church threatened to excommunicate me and I had a fractured relationship with my family for years) before learning that my spiritual journey was mine and mine alone to discover and develop.

4. We're eager to experiment: Instead of engaging in rote religious rituals we are apt to turn to more unconventional practices. During my experimental year, I delighted in sampling from the spiritual smorgasbord, trying more than 20 spiritual practices including singing in choirs, forest therapy, secular Lent, hosting a death dinner, taking a pilgrimage to Walden Pond, immersing myself in a float tank, dancing with witches, trying past life regression therapy and sampling magic mushrooms for the first time.

5. We're getting closer to the end: The boomer generation is creating a death boom—more than 250,000 Canadians over 50 die every year. We're at the forefront of a death acceptance movement that's transforming the topic of dying from taboo to a normal part of life. Witness the rise of death cafes, green cemeteries, home burials and legislation for medically-assisted dying. Death is our last great spiritual experience. We want it to be meaningful. Considering our death provides us with a sense of urgency about our legacy and the kind of world we want to leave behind. In his play "Our Town," the great playwright Thornton Wilder asks, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?" It's in contemplating our death that we might truly realize how we want to live our life.

Anne Bokma is the author of My Year of Living Spiritually: From Woo-Woo to Wonderful—One Woman's Secular Quest for a More Soulful Life, out this October from publisher Douglas & McIntyre. For more information go to: www.anebokma.com.

For a chance to win one of five copies of the book go to foreveryoungnews.com.



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ACROSS

- 1. Fish found in the North Atlantic Ocean
- 4. Air pollution
- 8. Calf meat
- 12. Zoo attraction
- 13. British rank of nobility
- 14. Soup vegetable
- 15. Apple computer, for short
- 16. Fish of the mackerel family
- 17. Act eagerly and suddenly
- 18. Satellite of Mars
- 20. Wildebeest
- 22. Outer protective layer
- 27. Place for casting metal
- 30. Weblike structure
- 31. Canadian Hall-of-Fame hockey player
- 32. Drilling tool
- 34. German granny
- 35. Rental agreement
- 37. Corrosion-resistant metal
- 39. Draw pictures to go along with a book
- 41. To the ___ degree
- 42. Tool for cutting long grass
- 46. Starring role
- 49. Genus of freshwater mussels
- 51. Calendar abbreviation
- 52. Killer whale
- 53. List of choices

DOWN

- 1. Cabin in the countryside
- 2. Moonfish
- 3. Art ___
- 4. Mediocre alternative
- 5. Orchestra conductor
- 6. Pioneering Canadian aviator
- 7. Christmas drink in Scandinavian countries
- 8. Cubic capacity
- 9. ___ out (make a living)
- 10. Altar constellation
- 11. Lie partly over
- 19. Garbage can
- 21. Healthy to eat
- 23. Monetary unit of Iceland
- 24. "The Time Machine" people
- 25. Former cannery town in British Columbia
- 26. One of the sides in a game
- 27. Former Expos shortstop

- 28. Russian city
- 29. Russian river
- 33. Opposite of writing
- 36. Half a weekend
- 38. Calendar abbreviation
- 40. Mitten part
- 43. Pretzel shape
- 44. Being by itself
- 45. Fifty-fifty
- 46. Stripped tree trunk segment
- 47. Be incorrect
- 48. Hole in one
- 50. Born

ANSWERS

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