



# thirtysomethingish

Now that the TV show that defined the angst of a generation is finally available on DVD, a new wave of friends looks for the answers to adulthood's big questions by rewatching the tribulations of Elliot, Nancy, Ellyn, Hope, Michael, Melissa and Gary. by Malwina Gudowska



# swerve

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"It's about a group of people, all of a certain age, who know enough about life to be totally confused by it. It's about growing up—no matter how old you are."

—thirtysomething creators Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick



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Is it possible to have the career, the house, the marriage and the kids? A former Hope who now identifies most closely with Michael looks for the answers to adulthood's big questions by rewatching episodes of the TV show that defined a generation—and by sticking close to her friends. **BY MALWINA GUDOWSKA**

COVER PHOTOGRAPHED BY **BRYCE MEYER**

**ABOVE:** The cast of *thirtysomething* (from left to right): Timothy Busfield (Elliot), Patricia Wettig (Nancy), Polly Draper (Ellyn), Mel Harris (Hope), Ken Olin (Michael), Melanie Mayron (Melissa) and Peter Horton (Gary).

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photographed by Bryce Meyer





# the new thirtysomethings

*Is it possible to have the career, the house, the marriage and the kids? A former Hope who now identifies most closely with Michael looks for the answers to adulthood's big questions by rewatching episodes of the TV show that defined a generation—and by sticking close to her friends.* by Malwina Gudowska

I went to high school with a skinny boy named Conor. He had long dreads, played drums in a punk band, wore stained button-up shirts and smoked a lot of weed. He used to say he was going to kill himself when he turned 30 because no one parties after that—and what's life without a party? After reconnecting with his older brother recently, I learned that Conor has not, in fact, killed himself. He lives in Victoria, is married to a lovely girl, has a good job and just added twins to his family, bringing the tally up to four kids.

When you're in high school, 30 is old. When you're eight, it's ancient. You never think you're really going to be 30. Twenty-one—sure. Twenty-seven—okay. Thirty—never. Part of the reason why we balk at this milestone is that, no matter whether 60 is the new 40 or 40 is the new 20, 30 still stands for adulthood. In your thirties, you're supposed to have started ticking off the list of accomplishments: career, marriage, house, kids. Michael, Alexandra and Julia were to be my offspring, and at least two of them were supposed to be born by now. You see, I turned 30 earlier this month and, like many fledgling adults, my life hasn't turned out quite the way I thought it would. For one, I don't have kids. And if I did, I would never bestow those names on them.

My mother was 30 when we immigrated to Canada from Poland. She left her home town, family and friends, along with her career as a pharmacist, for a dark basement suite on Kirk Crescent in the middle of a harsh Saskatoon winter. My father got his first job teaching English in Canada right around the time he turned 30—it's a feat for an immigrant to get a position in his field right away. They were already parents to then five-year-old me, their only child, who was named after a heroine in a Polish love story about star-crossed lovers Malwina and Ludomir.

Just after his 30th birthday, Tiger Woods won his 10th major, while Chopin had already composed most of his work and Joan Didion had published her first novel. On the other hand, Harrison Ford at 30 had yet to be discovered. Julia Child didn't learn to cook until she was in her late thirties. Robert Frost didn't pen most of his poetry until he was in his forties.

Thirty may just be a number, but there is still *something* about this decade that makes it seem more important, more defining than those that come before and after. I was eight when the aptly named TV series *thirtysomething* premiered on Sept. 29, 1987 and almost 12 when it was cancelled in 1991. Created by Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick, the show was about a close-knit group of friends grappling with the opposing forces of adulthood (i.e. career vs. family, freedom vs. settling down, honesty vs. betrayal, dreams vs. reality).

The show was applauded for its smart, funny and sometimes searing writing, yet was also criticized for focusing too much on the trivial problems of whiny American yuppies. The seven main characters included Hope and Michael Steadman, the married couple with a baby and a house who linked everyone together; Elliot, Michael's business partner, his sometimes wife Nancy, the budding artist, and their two kids; Ellyn, the career woman and Hope's best friend since childhood; Melissa, Michael's photographer cousin; and Gary, Michael's best friend in college and the playboy who never grew up.

As with any great ensemble that comes to define a generation, whether it's *Friends* or *Sex and the City*, viewers see facets of themselves and their friends in the characters. As a teenager, I watched *thirtysomething* reruns on Bravo and Lifetime, imagining myself as Hope, the calm, pretty Princeton grad and writer married to handsome, funny, driven Michael. Career woman Ellyn left me cold, while neurotic Melissa was too loud. I never understood flighty Elliot and tightly wound Nancy. Gary was the cute guy I hoped would ask me out.

Now that I'm the same age as the characters, I gravitate toward Ellyn and Melissa; overachieving Hope makes me squirm. Newly married, I can understand the tension and pain in Elliot and Nancy's relationship, and I'm so grateful that the Garys no longer hold any allure. But even though I'm a woman, I identify most with Michael, the show's main protagonist (and the alter ego of its creators). He wants to be a good husband, a good friend, a good father and a good boss, but he's cracking under the weight of all the responsibility. Most of the time, he puts on a facade and hopes no one will call him on it. He's always overwhelmed—when his mother pays him a visit, she tells him he's been overwhelmed since nursery school. By the show's fourth season, with his career and his marriage unravelling, he's forced to rethink everything he'd thought he wanted.

Last week, the first season of *thirtysomething* was finally released on DVD, with plans for the subsequent three seasons to be released at six-month intervals. While the series is dated when it comes to superficial things—fashion, music, technology—20 years later, friends and I are grappling with the same timeless issues as the characters in *thirtysomething*. I know I have to let go of the idealism and freedom of youth in exchange for security and responsibility, so why do I find myself fighting adulthood with everything I've got? At first, I looked to the show for answers about my future. Now that I'm on the other side of 30, I find myself just as overwhelmed and unsure as Michael, making the questions the show raises even more relevant today.

## Is Real Life Just a Pale Extension of High School?

New mother Hope struggles to remain the golden girl at the top of the class, while outwardly confident Michael desperately tries to impress his work friends. Ellyn, in her power suit with dangly clip-on earrings, sneaks out of her office at City Hall and rushes over to Hope and Michael's, eager to catch the eye of the contractor renovating the kitchen.

Hope to Ellyn: "You are still in high school."

Ellyn: "Who isn't?"

That isn't a comforting thought. By 30 the moment has come when we realize where we thought we would be isn't where we are at all. Michael always wanted to be a writer. With a wife and a baby and

a house to pay for, he goes into advertising instead, eventually starting his own firm. When that firm goes bankrupt, and he winds up in more debt than if he'd stuck to his true passion, he likens his dream to the Home Shopping Network—once something is gone from the screen, it's gone forever.

The week after my 30th birthday a card arrived from a high-school friend now living in London. The front had a bright orange background with abstract scribbles and a yellow quote by Ann Landers: "Inside every 30-year-old is an 18-year-old asking, 'What happened?'" On the inside, my friend wrote a sentimental message, reminiscing about moments we shared growing up in Saskatoon. There we were Monday morning, age 16 or 17, skipping first period and having waffles at Grainfields Family Restaurant just off of Eighth Street. We were too embarrassed to go to school after getting drunk on Saturday night and making fools of ourselves in front of the boys we loved (unrequitedly, at least in my case). *Twelve years happened* is the best answer I can give my 18-year-old self.

During graduating year at Holy Cross High School, students are asked to write a line or two to be printed along with their final yearbook photo. Thank yous are common, as are quotes. I chose a Counting Crows lyric. Not from "Mr. Jones" but from "Long December," a song better known for its video in which Courtney Cox makes her first post-Springsteen musical appearance.

"I can't remember all the times I tried to tell myself to hold on to these moments as they passed," it says under my awkward graduation photo taken post-dramatic haircut and bleach. Twenty years later, I am still telling myself to hold on to these moments as they pass while my 18-year-old self feels like she's been fooled into believing she's 30.

In Gail Sheehy's 1976 book *Passages* about the crises of adult life, the disparity between people's actual chronological ages and their inner image of themselves was one of her most consistent findings. My aunt at 54 insists she still feels like she's 28. And then she sees her reflection in a store window and wonders, What happened?

## Whose House Do You Call Home?

*Thirtysomething* is set in Philadelphia, far from all of the characters' parents and siblings. This distance is key to one of the central themes of the show: the idea of fashioning a new sense of home and family with friends.

Ellyn: "If you go home to, like, where your parents live, it's like saying that the place you live in now isn't really home."

The Steadmans live at 1710 Bryn Mawr Ave. in a fixer-upper that doubles as the group's clubhouse. It's where they come when they're happy, when they're sad, when they want to look through the fridge. Constantly in a state of disrepair—and an enormous source of stress for Michael—it's home for the single characters, who are still renters.

Melissa: "When one door closes, another opens. But what if you live in a loft?"

I transferred to Calgary after my first year at the University of Saskatchewan but for a long time, home was still the family house on Pitt Avenue. It was where I did my laundry (I would fill duffle bags and make the six-hour drive home often), where I was fed Polish food and where I didn't have to sweep (my parents were lax when it came to chores). Eventually, I got a place with a washing machine, started



# my parallel friends

The quirky characters of our favourite TV shows remind us of the best—and sometimes the worst—parts of ourselves and our closest friends.

**f**riendships, like relationships and sharks, have to keep moving or they die. Talking to Hope about her friendship with Ellyn, Michael says: “The two of you are like a married couple, you make the same mistakes with each other over and over again.”

*Friends* was my generation’s *thirtysomething*. You were either a Monica, a Rachel or a Phoebe (often a mix of all three) and everyone had a Joey, Ross and Chandler in their lives. But, unlike *Friends*, in which life is a coffee shop and small battles are always resolved at the Central Perk, *thirtysomething* dissected friendships, often ripping out the guts and putting them back in the same hour. Sometimes, they allowed the time between episodes to heal the wounds.

One of my mother’s favourite lines about life has always been, “No one gets to choose their family.” But the family you do choose—your closest friends—can be even more challenging to maintain over the years. As Gary puts it, “You have to be vigilant about friendship. You have to attend to it and you don’t make it on the basis of one issue and you certainly don’t dismiss it on the basis of one mistake.”

When you’re an only child, with no cousins around, it’s nothing new to adopt friends as family. My aunts and uncles were friends of my parents and their kids, my siblings. My two best friends at school were my sisters and their many siblings adopted me as theirs. But when you’re an adult, there are new rules. If you’re lucky enough to have friends whose fridges you can look through, you hold on to it with every fibre of your being, even though it would be much easier to let go at times.

The characters of *thirtysomething* are archetypes for the touchstones in my life (see sidebar). I have been friends with my Ellyn since I was nine. She doesn’t always agree with me (rarely, actually) and I don’t agree with her, but somehow that’s OK. We laugh at the same jokes and we laugh hard. I used to be a lippy kid who’d get into trouble for swearing in the locker room and I grew up to be an overly analytical woman who thinks too much for her own good. She allows me to be both. And yes, we’ve been compared to a married couple.

My Nancy is not really a Nancy in that we didn’t meet through our husbands. But we call each other sisters from different-coloured mothers. She’s only known me as an adult and she gets me as I am now, mainly because we are so much alike. We wish everyone thought the way we did and that provides hours of entertainment. She’s brutally honest and will give it to me straight up, hard to hear but in the end, good to know.

My Melissa is metaphorically my cousin (how perfect, given my self-association with Michael). When you grow up in an immigrant family, you’re instantly bonded with the other families that come from the same country. Your parents are her parents and her parents are yours. With us, it’s the type of bond where I can tell her my deepest, darkest awful secret I would never want the world to know, and she will reply: me too. She stands up for me when I can’t stand up for myself and she allows me to speak in circles until I turn blue. —*Malwina Gudowska*



## Maria as “Ellyn”

Like Ellyn, Maria is an independent woman who would probably never take her husband’s name. She’s got a little Hope in her and doesn’t allow you to wallow in anything for too long. Sometimes, you have to tell her you’re not interested in hearing the other side. Like Ellyn, she’s got fabulous eyebrows. Unlike Ellyn, she has been in a long-term relationship for six years and is very much a nurturer.

**On being 30:** “I didn’t want to turn 30 but I am now seeing it as a more positive thing and it’s better than I thought it would be!”



## Aliya as “Nancy”

Like Nancy, Aliya is a gentle soul, but with a spark. She’s a wife and mother, and is still trying to figure out what those roles mean. When she breaks down, she gets right back up, wiser for the experience. And, like Nancy, Aliya has great hair.

**On being 30:** “I don’t look at life as an age, it’s more about the stage. I don’t think 30 is old by any means but I do feel like I’ve grown up a lot and the fun I have now is much different than what it used to be.”



## Chris as “Elliot”

Like Elliot, Chris is the life of the party, but unlike Elliot, in a very subtle manner. He’s funny, warm and carefree. He sees the pleasures in life and doesn’t let the small things get to him.

**On being 30, and nearing 40:** “I think in my twenties I wanted to be where the action was—I had a fear of missing out on the party. Now I realize the party is not that exciting and actually rather redundant. All of a sudden, Sunday morning with the paper and a coffee feels more appealing.”



## Chad as “Michael”

Like Michael, Chad is driven and ambitious. He’s kind, loving and wants the best for the people in his life. Unlike Michael, he doesn’t focus on life’s shortcomings (he leaves that to me, his wife) and has no regrets.

**On being 30:** “There has been a shift in what and who is most important to me. You do find yourself getting busier and busier, and though free time becomes more scarce, I have a much clearer understanding of where I want to spend that time.”



## Malwina as “Hope”

Like Hope, I’d like to think that what I do matters and I wonder how I would balance it all if and when it gets to that point (I have a hard enough time already). Unlike Hope, I tend to think

in greys as opposed to absolutes. I’m not a mother and I can’t imagine being as all-consumed by my child as she was. But then again, never say never.

**On being 30:** “I’m completely obsessed with time, so getting older is not exactly easy. But I am happy with where I am and can’t imagine going back a decade, even if I do wish I knew then what I know now.”



## Joanna as “Melissa”

Like Melissa, Joanna is a free spirit who doesn’t take herself too seriously. She’s family and the one you can go to for advice on anything. And she could totally rock Melissa’s funky ’80s wardrobe. Unlike Melissa, she’s married to her best friend and has a brilliant career as

a literary agent in Chicago.

**On being 30:** “I love it because I feel more confident and sure of myself, but at the same time there’s the notion of time and I don’t love the fact that 40 comes next. And with that comes the realization that maybe I can’t do it all.”



## Jakub as “Gary”

Like Gary, Jakub is young at heart (which makes sense given that he’s only 22). But since Gary would still be 22 at 60, they’re alike. Unlike Gary, Jakub has

plans to grow up one day, but not before having a guitar-playing/surfing career like Jack Johnson.

**On being 30:** “I am hoping my thirties will be as adventurous as my twenties are turning out to be. I understand that there will be a lot more responsibilities but I don’t see any reason why I can’t continue doing the things I am doing now and being as youthful as I am now. Ideally, I hope to find someone to share that adventure with, but if not, that’s cool as well.”

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dabbling in Polish cuisine and married a man who is a much better sweeper than I am.

My husband and I live in a downtown condo where, when we signed on the dotted line to buy, the building's rules came as a relief: no pets and no kids (yes, it's legal). I'm often asked when we're going to buy a house, the second notch in adulthood's belt. But the condo provides a cautionary metaphor for the ladder of maturity: The higher you go in a building, the bigger and more expensive the place. For some, when you live in the penthouse, you've arrived.

The other day, as I pressed the elevator button for the 22nd floor (the 23rd is the top and houses the crème de la crème of suites), a short, burly man going up to 16 turned to me and said: "Almost the penthouse, hey?" "Yeah, almost," I replied, grateful still to be getting off one floor below.

### Can You Ever Escape The Parent Trap?

No matter how grown-up the characters felt, there was never any shortage of blaming their parental units for life's disappointments. The discovery that your parents were people before you, and are people without you, is hard. It doesn't happen to everyone but when it does, there's a layer of childhood innocence that's ripped off quickly like a Band-Aid.

Michael to Ellyn, whose parents are divorcing after a seemingly perfect 40-year marriage: "You never know how much you count on your parents being together, and all of a sudden, they are two different people."

Ellyn: "They're 60 years old—why are they doing this and why do I care?"

I was 21 when my parents separated. They have since reunited, but when my mother told me she was moving out, I instantly reverted to being an inconsolable child. It was the first time I despised being an only child—like Ellyn there was no one else who had the same parents and could understand what I was going through.

Watching the old episodes last week, I sobbed watching Ellyn sob after she asks her mother why she married her father. Her mother explains that there are two kinds of boys in high school: the good-looking ones, the ones on every team, the best dancers, the ones whom everyone wants. And then there are the boys who always look like they'd rather be somewhere else, the shy, awkward ones—and those are the boys to marry.

Ellyn's mom: "Those are the boys that tell you the secrets, that hold you at night when you cry, that want to grow old with you."

Ellyn: "How do you know about this, Mom?"

Ellyn's mom: "Because I married a great dancer."

It's said you never really grow up until one, or both of your parents passes away. In the first season, Michael learns his father is dying and questions everything he thought he knew about life up to then. Unlike the charming, fluffy *Friends*, *thirtysomething* never shied away from tapping into intense emotion when dealing with issues that were shockingly intimate for prime-time, pre-HBO TV.

Michael, shaken with emotion, refuses to hold his daughter, Janey: "Why love someone if they're going to die?"

I wish the writers had come up with a clever one-liner to answer that one.

### Who's in Control of Birth Control?

Nothing—not the shoulder pads, teased bangs or baggy jeans—signified the seemingly liberated '80s woman more than the numerous references in *thirtysomething* to the diaphragm. That odd little rubber contraption requires a woman to stop having spontaneous sex and, in the moment, decide whether there's any possible conceiving to be had. My generation swallows a pill in the morning or gets a shot in a doctor's office and is good to go for days or months at a time. The decision has already been made in advance, which makes it one less choice to fixate upon.

There were plenty of discussions about parenthood throughout the show's run. Once you reach 30, you're supposed to have, or want to have, babies in the near future. But it's also the point when, if you're not ready, you start to think there must be something gravely wrong with you. Single artist Melissa dreams about her biological clock ticking while life-sized sperm dance around her. Ellyn seems to lack the nurturing gene—even her cat hates her—and her disinterest in babies causes a rift with Hope, the maternal beacon.

Ellyn: "A lot of women don't want children, Gary. We just try to keep it a secret so we don't end up on *Donahue*."

Gary: "Don't you want your slice of the future?"

Ellyn: "I think the future will be just fine without my help."

Gary: "How can you be so sure?"

It was a valiant effort by the writers (which included the wives of the creators) to explore both sides, but when it came down to it, the male characters with kids always seemed the happiest.

Gary: "Mike, do you ever think about who you are in this life and what kind of mark you will leave behind?"

Michael: "Didn't we talk about this in college?"

Gary: "But I mean now."

Michael: "There's Janey, I'm her father."

Women are still grappling with how much of their identities should be defined by their roles as mothers and caregivers. We've progressed in our vocabularies—substituting child-free for childless—but for many of us, myself included, it's still complicated, unexamined territory. In *thirtysomething*, there are the two families with kids and there are the three singles. What the show never examined was the in-betweens: married couples *without* children.

I've been the single with the couples and I have been a couple with the singles but I've never felt more left out than I do being married without children. At least when you're single, they still invite you out of pity. When you don't have a three-year-old to bring to a play date, you don't bring anything to the table. Newly married a few months ago, surrounded by friends with babies, I turned to my husband and said: "I think we should have a baby so I can fit in."

"That's not a reason to bring a child into this world," he replied.

In the second season, Melissa, feeling the time crunch to procreate, contemplates having a baby with Gary, her ex.

Hope: "Melissa, no one is judging you, it's 1989."

Me: "They'll *still* be judging you in 2009."

### When Does the Judging Stop?

Chronically single, commitment-phobic Ellyn does, in the end, marry a man named Billy. but much to his disdain, she doesn't

want to take his last name.

Ellyn: “You can still be married and be free, right?”

I am one of the few among my friends and my husband’s friends who have chosen not to take their spouse’s last name. I can’t really tell you why, because it’s a perfectly lovely last name, but a year after our wedding, it’s not something I consider a priority. According to a study presented earlier this month by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University, 70 percent of Americans feel that women should take their husband’s last name, and 50 percent say it should be a legal requirement. A recent trip to the U.S. highlighted how out of sync with the mainstream I am.

Snow, the customs agent: “Are you two married?”

Me (thinking): *Is Snow really your name or do you do the fake name-tag thing like we used to do when I worked as a cashier at Co-op?*

Snow flips through our passports.

Me: “Yes.”

Snow: “But you don’t have the same last name.”

Me (thinking): *Yes, because it’s 2009 and it doesn’t make my marriage any better or more important if I fill out some papers.*

Instead, I just smiled and shrugged my shoulders while he looked at my husband with this sucks-your-wife-didn’t-take-your-name kind of look and returned our passports. For the record, my husband says he’s fine with it.

## How Long After “I Do” Until You Don’t?

*Thirtysomething* dealt with every facet of modern-day marriage, often using knowing humour to lower the temperature of those daily irritations that can escalate and shatter a relationship. Michael asks Hope if there’s any conditioner. She asks if he’s looked in the shower: “Maybe one of these days, you’ll grasp the idea that I don’t have a secret supply closet in the house.”

But the show also dealt with the serious side of monogamy, including whether you can sustain passion and respect for your spouse, or whether it is possible to recover from infidelity or loss of faith. The answer seemed to come down to what kind of man you chose. Although Michael had his faults (wasn’t always so nice, was moody and an over-thinker), in comparison to faithless Elliot and fickle Gary, he was worth risking your dreams on.

I went to New York for the first time five years ago with a girlfriend and we wound up on the *Sex and the City* bus tour (there’s no equivalent *thirtysomething* tour in Philadelphia). At one point, the tour guide asked us to raise our hands if we thought Carrie should have ended up with Aidan, the sweet, level-headed furniture designer, instead of Mr. Big. On the crowded bus packed with women of all ages, I was the only one who raised her hand.

At the urging of my friend Aliya (my own version of Nancy), my husband proposed to me with a loaner ring so there was no questioning how well he knew me on the basis of a ring shape: He knew me so well that I got to design my own ring.

I liked dating the dancers, but I always knew I didn’t want to marry one, and my husband will be the first to tell you he would rather be somewhere else, reading a book—the second type of man Ellyn’s mother described.

I feel unqualified to speak about marriage, having celebrated only

my first anniversary this month, but what they say is true: it’s not easy and it is work. Around us, couples are already breaking up. Even for a generation that vowed not to make their parents’ mistakes, there are no guarantees.

When Ellyn and Melissa try video dating (the prelude to today’s online dating), neither woman meets her match and you see them lamenting about how good Hope has it. The camera pans to the Steadmans, who are attempting a family dinner at home while Janey screams at the table. No matter how afraid Melissa and Ellyn are of being alone, they are just as afraid of being disappointed by Mr. Right.

Melissa: “You know when you see couples and you know they’ll never last?”

Ellyn: “Like Sean and Madonna? Warren and Madonna?”

Me: “Like Guy and Madonna?”

## Is There Life After Thirtysomething?

Every decade since the series ended, magazines and newspapers have contacted the *thirtysomething* actors to touch base. In some cases art has imitated life: Melanie Mayron, who played Melissa, the character haunted by her biological clock, is a single mother of two. Ken Olin (Michael) remains married to an actress from the show, except it’s Patricia Wettig (Nancy). The couple appear on *Brothers and Sisters*, a series produced and directed by Olin. Peter Horton gave a striking performance on the first season of *In Treatment*, playing a character very much like Gary, a Peter Pan in his 50s, with a daughter he’s let down to devastating effect. Married for the second time and a father, he’s now a producer on *Grey’s Anatomy*. For the rest of the cast, it’s been the polar opposite: Mel Harris, who played devoted wife Hope, has been divorced five times, while Polly Draper, child-free Ellyn, has two sons who star in the successful tween series, *The Naked Brothers Band*, which she created, writes and directs.

In 2007, the women of *thirtysomething*, then in their fifties, reunited for an arthritis-prevention campaign. With images of them from the DVD still fresh in my mind—Hope brushing her glossy mane in a camisole and black bikini briefs, Ellyn swimming lap after lap, Melissa snapping photos in her Madonna-inspired get-ups—the campaign was a reminder that as tumultuous as your thirties may be, you’re still in the prime of your life.

There’s a popular Polish saying, “*starosc nie radosc*,” which means “old age is not happiness” (in Polish it rhymes, sounding much better). All of my life, I’ve heard people around me randomly throw it out. “*Starosc nie radosc*,” my father says when his back aches; “*Starosc nie radosc*,” my mom says about no longer being a Size 6.

I have always hated those three words and hoped that I would find another slogan for growing older. Thirty isn’t ancient, but it is a little closer to the end. It makes us idealize the past a little more and, to varying degrees, fear the future. And like the characters on *thirtysomething*, we’re all just trying to come to terms with it, without losing everything we thought we would be and maybe loosening our grip on life’s checklist just a little bit.

Hope: “You can’t tell me there was a time in my life when I wasn’t different.”

Michael: “Like younger?”

Hope: “No, a time when I wasn’t taking care of a kid, a house and a husband and trying to find room in my stove for a 20-pound turkey.” **S**