Opinion: Gen Xers coping with midlife crisis

By Sara Scribner, Salon

In the 1993 movie “Falling Down,” Michael Douglas plays an angry white man whose midlife crisis has him nearly foaming at the mouth. Appalled by a brutal traffic jam and disorienting changes in his world, he flips out in a Korean liquor store, tangles with the homeless and construction workers, amassing an arsenal as he tries to make his way across town. His breakdown leaves casualties, makes the news — everyone notices. An eloquent latter-day equivalent, Noah Baumbach’s “Greenberg,” shows a meltdown going differently: The protagonist’s moment of crisis: Shrouded in an oversize ski vest, he wanders alone, quiet and pathetic, existentially lost on the edges of a party. Even his best friends don’t notice.

Created nearly 20 years apart, the films illustrate two different generations hitting middle age. People heard it loud and clear when the baby boomers crossed over to midlife — you couldn’t avoid it. Radio talk show hosts probed into the transition, newspapers described boomer women coping with crow’s feet and men reclaiming their vitality in tribal drum circles. For the generation born after — in the ‘60s and ‘70s, raised by television like no previous generation and with the divorce rate skyrocketing during their childhood years — there is no media watch broadcasting their new trajectory. Few have even noticed that this small, notoriously rebellious clan — those born roughly between 1965 and 1980, which means about 46 million Xers versus 80 million boomers — has entered middle age. It’s a transition that, until now, has been captured, mulled over and ridiculed for each generation for more than a half-century. But not this time.

The problem is, with adulthoods repeatedly shipwrecked by

economic disasters, Xers might have neglected to track the crossing over. Susan Gregory Thomas, author of the resonant memoir ”In Spite of Everything,” says that many Xers “are always living in a state of triage, always in a survivalist mode. We’re not thinking long-term.”

How is Generation X dealing with middle age? Celebration, turmoil, regret? Which issues are keeping Xers up at night? What happens when they wake up?

There’s plenty to joke about when it comes to midlife — there’s the stereotypical folly of the aging man grabbing his red Porsche and buxom young thing in order to stave off the fear of death. Crises are inherently filmic — and most of those films play midlife for laughs or shock value. Think of the musical-bed high jinks in “Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice” or Peter Sellers getting high with nubile hippies in “I Love You, Alice B. Toklas!”

But whether the rest of the world notices or not, it’s time for Xers — which, admittedly, is a broad, diverse bunch — to start assessing in a way that goes beyond punch lines.

Whether you believe, as Gail Sheehy stated in “Passages,” the ‘70s pop-culture classic on human life stages, that middle age is psychologically hard-wired or, as Patricia Cohen recently asserted in the book “In Our Prime: The Invention of Middle Age,” mostly a social and scientific construct, the pull of doing a full life assessment and inventory somewhere in your 40s has been historically difficult to resist.

This is true even when the inventory involves saying goodbye to youthful hopes. As Miranda July said about the inspiration for her film “The Future” in a 2011 *New York Times* magazine profile, “It’s kind of about letting go of that feeling of my 20s, that feeling that I will do absolutely everything, I will have sex with everyone, I will go to every country,” she says. “In your 30s, it’s obvious that a finite amount of things will

happen.”

And then 40 – well, it’s all downhill from there. Right?

Read the whole story

Beverages coming in specialized cans

By Kristen Leigh Painter, Denver Post

The standard 12-ounce beer can is being squeezed off store shelves as beverage makers try to one-up each other not only with what’s inside their cans but what the can itself looks like.

Consumers can now choose from cans with temperature-sensitive ink indicating a drinkable chill, wider tops meant to release more flavor and simulate drinking from a glass, or re-closeable lids.

Steep competition is driving companies across all beverage sectors toward customized aluminum can shapes, sizes, colors and textures – spurring innovation, and significant investment in new technology, among the world’s can manufacturers.

Seeing the writing on the wall three years ago, Broomfield, Colo.-based can-maker Ball Corp. invested $400 million into growing its speciality can capabilities.

Read the whole story

4.2 temblor hits near Reno

People as far away as Folsom said they felt the 4.2 earthquake that hit Northern Nevada on Monday night.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the temblor hit about two miles northeast of Spanish Springs at 5:51pm Aug. 26.

No damage has been reported.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Agreement reached to repair Mono Lake damage

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

Ending decades of bitter disputes over fragile Mono Lake, Los Angeles and conservationists on Friday announced an agreement to heal the environmental damage caused by diverting the lake's eastern Sierra tributary streams into the city's World War II-era aqueduct.

The controversy over alkaline Mono Lake, which is famous for its bizarre, craggy tufa formations and breeding grounds for sea gulls and migratory birds, is one of California's longest-running environmental disputes.

The settlement resolves all of the issues among weary combatants, including the city of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles

Department of Water and Power, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Trout and the Mono Lake Committee.

It calls for construction of a $15-million adjustable gate in Grant Dam, an earthen structure 87 feet high and 700 feet long designed to impound tributary water. The goal is to release pulses of water along a seven-mile stretch of Rush Creek to mimic annual flood cycles, distributing willow seeds and promoting healthy trout populations. The settlement will not affect water levels at Mono Lake.

Read the whole story

Frog protection has trout backers up in arms



The yellow-legged frog protection is becoming more controversial. Photo/Vance Vredenburg/Associated Press/1969

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

A federal proposal to make the Sierra Nevada as comfortable as possible for some of their rarest amphibian inhabitants has stirred a backlash from business owners over the economic pain it could cause the region’s recreation industry.

Many opponents worry the proposal would do more to protect frogs and toads than nonnative trout – a top tourist draw in mountain resort communities where cash registers ring up purchases by vacationers, hikers and fishing enthusiasts this time of year.

The controversy hinges on a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to designate roughly 2 million acres in 16 Northern California counties as critical habitat for the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, the mountain yellow-legged frog and the Yosemite toad.

Read the whole story

Learn about the Truckee River Watershed Council

The Truckee River Winery is hosting a River Talk for people to learn more about the work the Truckee River Watershed Council does.

The River Talk is a one hour virtual tour of a few of council’s projects and core programs. It’s a way to learn about TRWC’s work to protect, enhance, and restore the watershed, as well as different ways individuals can get involved.

It is also an opportunity for guests to ask questions and

share comments and feedback.

The event is Sept. 19. Wine and appetizers are from 5-6pm and the talk from 6-7pm. The cost is $10, which includes one glass of wine.

For more info and to RSVP, call (530) 587.4626. The winery is at 11467 Brockway Road, Truckee.

Multiple senses play a role in how food tastes

By Michael Moyer, Scientific American

Taste is not what you think. Every schoolchild learns that it is one of the five senses, a partner of smell and sight and touch, a consequence of food flitting over taste buds that send important signals – sweet or bitter, nutrient or poison? – to the brain. Were it so simple.

In the past decade our understanding of taste and flavor has exploded with revelations of the myriad and complex ways that food messes with our consciousness—and of all the ways that our biases filter the taste experience. Deliciousness is both ingrained and learned, both personal and universal. It is a product of all five senses (hearing included) interacting in unexpected ways, those sensory signals subject to gross revision by that clump of nerve tissue we call the brain.

Let’s start at the beginning: Food enters your mouth, meets your teeth and begins to be broken down by enzymes in your saliva. The morsel soon moves over your papillae, the few

thousand bumps that line your tongue. Each papilla houses onion-like structures of 50 to 100 taste cells folded together like the petals of a young flower about to bloom—taste buds, we call them. These cells have chemical receptors attuned to the five basic tastes—bitter, sweet, sour, salt and umami, the last a word borrowed from Japanese that describes the savory flavors of roast meat or soy sauce.

Read the whole story

Baby boomers may lack caregivers in old age

By Walter Hamilton, Los Angeles Times

Baby boomers may have no one to care for them in their old age.

Shifting demographics mean that aging boomers will have fewer friends and family members to take care of them as they get into their 80s, according to a new study by AARP.

In other words, even though you may be supporting your own elderly parents, the chances of someone being there for you are numerically diminished.

Read the whole story

Smoke dissipates; American Fire meeting set

Smoke continues to be a problem in some parts of Tahoe and the surrounding area. While the South Shore awoke to blue skies on Monday, the Woodfords area was smoky.

Smoke from the Rim Fire is now mostly going south of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Rim Fire near Yosemite is at 15 percent containment, having burned 149,780 acres. It is the 13th largest fire in California's history.

There will be a community meeting in Foresthill on Aug. 26 at 7pm regarding the American Fire. The meeting is at the Veterans Memorial Hall, 24601 Harrison St.

The fire is 81 percent contained. It has burned 24,408 acres.

Part of the Tahoe National Forest remains closed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

FDA looking for new ways to check food imports

By Justin Bachman, Bloomberg Businessweek

Food destined for the U.S. would be inspected abroad and importers would be held more accountable for ensuring its safety, under new rules proposed by the Food and Drug Administration.

Federal regulators are pushing to tackle a problem that has long plagued the food supply: too few inspectors facing more and more imports. As it stands now, only a tiny fraction of foreign-made foods is examined at the border before completing that inexorable procession to grocery stores and into American bellies.

In essence, the government is seeking to outsource work to companies that already have food-sourcing operations overseas – a way to "leverage the private sector," as a former FDA official told the New York Times. Under the rules proposed in late July, food importers would need to ensure that their foreign suppliers comply with FDA safety rules or that local regulations meet U.S. requirements. The measures also outline accreditation procedures for third-party auditors who would inspect food suppliers.

The new rules are also designed to reduce the occurrence of recalls and the outbreaks of food-borne illnesses that can prove fatal. About 48 million Americans get sick, some 128,000 are hospitalized and about 3,000 die each year from food-borne diseases, according to federal officials.

Food imports have surged in recent years as Costco, Walmart, Target and other retailers have responded to consumer demand for a greater variety of foods and fresh produce available year-round. About 15 percent of the U.S. food supply is imported, including a fifth of vegetables and half the nation's fresh fruit. Strawberries, for example, were once a seasonal product in U.S. stores but can now be purchased year-round.

At the same time, Americans continue to perceive domestically sourced foods as safer than imports, says Marianne Rowden, president and chief executive of the American Association of Exporters & Importers, a trade group that counts several large importers such as Target and Mondelez International as members. (That perception gap remains, Rowden notes, even

after several illness outbreaks tied to U.S.-grown produce.)

The FDA portrays the changes as a more effective method of targeting the sources of contaminated foods rather than merely responding after people get sick.

“We will continue to check food at our borders,” Michael Taylor, the FDA’s deputy commissioner for foods and veterinary medicine, said in a statement on the agency’s website.

“However, rather than relying almost entirely on FDA’s investigators at the ports to detect and respond to food safety problems, importers would – for the first time – be held accountable for verifying, in a manner transparent to FDA, that the food they import is safe.”

Major food importers generally support the rule, mainly because the FDA consulted with the industry and conducted a thorough cost-benefit analysis, says Michael Robach, vice president of corporate food safety, quality and regulatory affairs for Cargill, a large U.S. food importer with operations in 55 countries.

“If you are doing the proper oversight … you’re actually in the long term going to be saving yourself money,” he says of costs associated with the inspection changes.

The Grocery Manufacturers Association, which represents U.S. food and drink companies such as Kraft Foods and General Mills was also supportive. The new law’s implementation “can serve as a role model for what can be achieved when the private and public sectors work together to achieve a common goal,” the association said in a statement.

What’s less clear, according to Rowden, is how smaller players without the infrastructure and supply-chain expertise of major food importers will comply with the law. She predicts “critiques around the edges of some technical aspects” but no major industry backlash against the regulations.

“The food companies are very conscious about their brands,” she says. “We look at this as brand protection, rather than just new regulation.”

The measures are open for public comment for 90 more days. They do not apply to seafood and fruit juices, two categories covered by other federal rules.

“To me, the real thrust of these regulations will always be about the FDA struggling to deal with the globalization of the food supply,” Rowden says. The agency, with its current staff and funding, is “just not equipped” to address so much food from abroad.