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Facing 50: Age is not just a number. I can explain after I find my reading glasses.

Sure, inner growth is a spectacular perk, but it doesn't mitigate the challenge of seeing your youth in the rear-view mirror.

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I turned 50 a few weeks ago and many well-intentioned friends said the same thing to me: “50 is just a number.” That is very kind, and also very untrue. If it were true, then 30 would just be a number and we would say it to 30-year-olds on their birthdays. But we don't, because most people don't worry about turning 30 and having to go for a colonoscopy or losing their reading glasses.

Fifty is a real age, with real biological, hormonal, chemical and spiritual consequences. Twenty, 30 and 40 are markers of change as well. But they are usually changes that don't require as much medical care or trips to the hair colorist.

I don't say this bitterly, but matter-of-factly. Facing 50 means facing the fact that dairy isn't my friend anymore, and that my workouts are becoming more low-impact, and that two glasses of white wine come with a price the next day. It means there is likely less runway ahead of me than behind me and it means my daughter looks better in my jeans than I do.

Gen X at 50: Kings of culture, innovation and so much more

If there is truly earned wisdom and inner peace at 50, then those qualities only convince me not to soothe myself with the consolation that along with the elasticity of my skin I have lost the need for others' approval. Inner growth is a spectacular perk, but it doesn't mitigate the challenge of seeing your youth in the rear-view mirror. And why must it? I plan to face getting older with dignity while simultaneously being honest about missing so many things about being young.

Getting honest about aging

I don't necessarily want to be 30 again and suffer through all the angst I have happily shed. But I do want to spend less on skincare than on food. I do want to have boundless energy and optimism. All the cold-pressed juices and affirmations in the world can't create the cocktail that is the youthful exuberance of young age. I wish I had that back now that I know exactly what to do with it.

What I do want is to be honest about turning 50. In so many ways it is great. And in so many ways it just isn't. I want to laugh and cry at the down-slope of biological reality I am now navigating, not pretend my way through it. I know Cindy Crawford looks amazing at 55 but put her next to her daughter and let's discuss. There are certain truths about life that even the most genetically blessed and disciplined among us are subject to.

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I asked my good friend for her best piece of advice for turning 50. She didn't have to think long or hard. Remember to clear a path on the floor between your bedroom and bathroom before you go to sleep, she warned me. She may not be Buddha but she gave me a much needed pearl of wisdom rather than a sugar-coated cliché about age being a state of mind. She is headed toward 60, so maybe getting to the point is a perk of that next decade. I will look forward to it.

Rebecca Sugar a philanthropic consultant in New York.