

Choosing fruit salad over a quarterlife crisis...

Anél Powell

If you were a fruit or a vegetable, what would you be? Joanne Jowell, author of "Managing the Quarterlife (crisis)" would choose fruit salad.

It is an apt description, indicative of her status as a "Quarterlifer".

On the night of her wedding, Joanne suddenly realised that she had no idea where her life was headed. She explains in her book, "I realised that there was no script for what was coming next: my home, my work, my identity, my dreams - they were all about to be transformed."

As a constant achiever, living life sans a script was an unfamiliar sensation for the Sea Point resident.

Chatting with Joanne in her airy Atlantic sea-facing apartment she shares with her husband, Richard, (who looks like he just finished a GQ fashion shoot) it is hard to link the attractive 20-something with words like "crisis" and "anxiety".

Adjectives like "successful", "content" and "accomplished" seem more apt. But it is precisely these expectations and labels that catapulted the Gauteng-born Jowell headlong into what she later termed, her Quarterlife crisis.

She had done it all - been a prefect at school, matriculated well, gained firsts at university and done the obligatory "London thing".

symptoms of their QC.

"Men are not allowed to stray too far from the career path. As they still feel responsible for being the earners and provides, they don't talk about their angst."

Talking about the angst is the first step towards recovering from the QC.

For Joanne, the watershed realisation on her wedding night prompted her to confront the issues and choices which were making her anxious.

Completing this, her first book, proved cathartic.

"Writing forced me to be objective about the crisis, and to put it outside of my head," she explained.

An honours in clinical psychology and extensive experience in man-

agement consultancy enabled Joanne to write a practical, yet personalised book about this emerging new condition.

Dr Aneta Shaw, a clinical psychologist with an interest in Quarterlife issues, validated the book which includes exercises and techniques for dealing with this modern malaise.

Hence the question, what fruit or vegetable would you choose to be?

Joanne chose fruit salad, to symbolise her constant questioning of her identity and direction in life.

But, whether you are a pear, a litchi or a nectarine, Joanne's advice is the same.

How one decides to use choices is often more significant than the

choices themselves.

She said that while Quarterlifers fret about age, career, location, dreams and identity, they are still young and malleable.

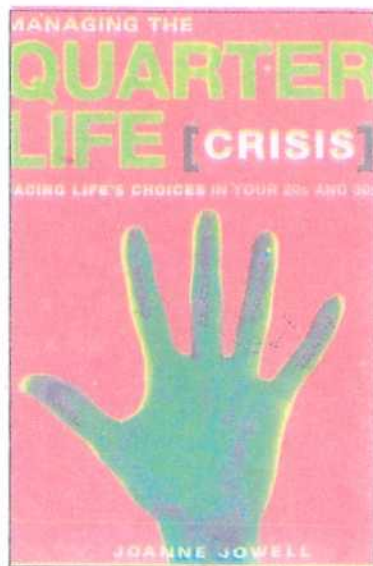
Instead of judging their achievements by the standards of others, Quarterlifers should rather base decisions on their own impetus.

Quarterlifers tend to fear failure.

Yet Joanne's view is that there is nothing worse than regret.

"Make a decision and go for it," she said.

■ "Managing the Quarterlife (crisis)" by Joanne Jowell, published by Struik.



Now, back in Cape Town for her wedding, Joanne was confronted by uncharted territory - an open future filled with choices.

This, said Joanne in her book, is when the Quarterlife crisis (QC) hits with a vengeance.

"Open the door to opportunity and the big QC comes waltzing through the door."

Joanne started talking to her friends and soon discovered that she was not alone. Most of her peers, aged between 25 and 35, were experiencing

For Quarterlifers, choice is a catalyst for anxiety, rather than a springboard to opportunity.

They find change in the status quo, and the plethora of questions this elicits, highly unsettling. Joanne refers to this as the "crisis of choice".

"The generations before us did not experience the same degree of choice or flux," said Joanne.

We can hop on an aeroplane and relocate to a new place and culture, within hours. Jobs are no longer gender-restricted.

Joanne said women, no longer relegated to the barefoot and pregnant kitchen existence of their predecessors, struggle with the range of choices they now face.

But, she said, the Quarterlife crisis is not just for women.

"We all struggle with social roles and expectations."

Male Quarterlifers just tend to shrug off the