

What Is This “Third Age” Thingie?

In North America, we tend to refer to the 45–60 age group as 'Baby Boomers' but throughout Europe and in a few other countries, like Australia and New Zealand, this age group is referred to as "Third Agers".

This label is based on the concept that there are four ages to the life-cycle of any human being. There used to be three ages, but now there are four, thanks to increasing life expectancy.

The First Age

The First Age is the age of learning and lasts from birth until about 25 years of age. During this time we learn how to be human through learning basic things like walking and talking. Then we learn how to make an economic contribution to our countries by learning job skills. During this age we also learn how to be good citizens by learning all of the customs, rituals and stereotypes that are our culture. Our learning is usually directed by others (our parents, course selection at schools, etc) and we either accept this or rebel against it.

The Second Age

The Second Age is the age of working and runs from about age 25 to around age 55. We develop our careers, have families, buy houses and furniture and cars, go on holidays, save for our retirement, save to put our kids through college, etc. This is the time when our careers develop and earnings grow to keep up with our spending needs – creating a bit of a vicious cycle. The careers we choose during this time of our lives are often governed by potential income rather than our potential enjoyment. Our career paths are often determined by others (our families, our bosses, the economy, etc.) which we either accept or rebel against.

The Third Age

The Third Age is the age of living. This age begins around the age of 50 to 55 – right around the time when the mid-life crisis is most likely to occur – and lasts until around 80 – 85 years of age. The kids are grown and either on their own (creating the 'empty-nest phenomenon') or they are old enough to look after themselves. As kids leave home, expenses decrease which means the pressure to increase earnings also decreases. People begin looking at alternative career options, ones that generate less income but provide a better life balance or tap into a passion or a purpose that has been previously ignored in favour of the escalating need to earn more money.

The choices we make regarding career, lifestyle design, etc, are made by us. We no longer have parents telling us what we should be doing or not doing. We can ignore bosses and switch careers or become self-employed. Even the demands of a spouse can be refused if they no longer support what we want to do with our lives.

This amount of freedom can be either extremely liberating or extremely debilitating. With no-one telling you what to do, there is no one to rebel against. The decisions are ones that you make; that you are responsible for.

It's kind of hard to rebel against yourself if you don't like the outcome of the decision. So... "paralysis by analysis" can become a comfortable place to live in.

This current cohort of people in the 40 and over age range is the first group in human history to experience this 'Third Age' in large numbers. Until now, only a small percentage of past generations have lived 80+ years. We don't even have the stereotypes created by previous generations to rebel against!!

Without a history of what to do during these years, Baby Boomers/Third Agers are writing their own scripts and designing their own lifestyles. Some are re-discovering passions for arts, music, writing and other creative pursuits. Others are re-discovering the joy of working with their hands, or their love of nature. Still others are re-connecting with their adventurous spirit and have started traveling extensively or fulfilled a long-held dream of learning how to scuba dive, or ride a horse, or sail.

Not everyone in this age range can afford to explore these lifestyle options. Many still have to earn an income but with fewer expenses the choice of where to work and what to do for a living expands greatly. Many members of this age group are becoming self-employed, or are choosing to work in jobs that don't pay very well, but offer other lifestyle benefits.

The choice for many Third Agers of what to do with the next 30 or so years of their lives, and where to do it is unlimited – which can be a touch overwhelming. The blog Ageless Explorers at <http://agelessexplorer.wordpress.com/> is focused on exploring options that are available to individuals navigating their way through this new Third Age.

The Fourth Age

There is also a Fourth Age of human development – this is the age of retirement. Generally occurring around the age of 85+ years old, this age incorporates the historical stereotypes of a typical retirement. A person physically begins to slow down, to live their life closer to home and not so much 'out there'.

So its not that we are not participating in traditional retirements, we still will be. It's just that these typical retirements will be occurring much later in life than they have in previous generations.

So, how are you going to live your Third Age? What are you going to do with this time in your life? Where are you going to live? Who are you going to live with? Can you afford to live for 30+ years on your current assets? If not, then what can or will you do about it?

So say tuned – it's quite the adventure!! :-)