

MID-LIFE



BY JOE OLLMANN

Mid-Life

Joe Ollmann

Download now

Read Online →

Mid-Life

Joe Ollmann

Mid-Life Joe Ollmann

WHEN THE BODY SAGS AND THE HONESTY LAGS

Mid-Life is the story of John, who at forty becomes a father again with his much younger second wife, which results in a slow, painful attack by flowered baby bags and front-facing baby carriers on his former virility and self-identity. John always believed that age is a state of mind; however, his adult daughters, baby son, energetic wife, stressful job, house full of cats, and flabby body—complete with bloated stomach and sagging bosom—all lead John reluctantly to admit that he is having a midlife crisis. The crisis drives John to yell at his wife, pick fights with his daughters, and miss deadlines at work that put his job on the line. He takes solace from the stress of everyday life with a seemingly harmless infatuation with the pretty children's performer Sherry Smalls, who sings adoringly to him directly from his son's DVD.

Sherry, meanwhile, is equally desperate to find a distraction in life. Her path to rock stardom has been rudely overtaken by a semi-successful but completely loathsome gig as a children's performer. It pays the bills, and a Saturday-morning television show is on the horizon—that is, if she is able to fire her alcoholic on-again, off-again boyfriend/bandmate.

As their lives snowball, John's infatuation turns into obsession and a haphazard, fateful e-mail leads to a necessary reality check that neither John nor Sherry may have wanted, but that both will surprisingly welcome.

Mid-Life Details

Date : Published March 1st 2011 by Drawn and Quarterly

ISBN : 9781770460287

Author : Joe Ollmann

Format : Paperback 184 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fiction, Graphic Novels Comics

 [Download Mid-Life ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Mid-Life ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Mid-Life Joe Ollmann

From Reader Review Mid-Life for online ebook

Veronica says

A pretty good character study of a (very) flawed man. I enjoy Ollmann's depictions of people, and would definitely read more.

Julian says

Hm.

This was an interesting read.

It was almost like watching a child standing close to a cake. He's been told not to touch it, he's not hungry, in fact he's full, but he likes cake, there it is in front of him and it doesn't matter that he's satisfied and doesn't need a thing - *he wants cake*. Maybe just a little lick of icing. Oh, the guilt! I didn't need that but, that's pretty tasty maybe if I just...and so on.

Apparently parts of this are autobiographical, which is pretty bold if true. I had that movie in my head kind of feel with this one too, after a while, and felt the characters were believable because they were so messed up (and probably real people...).

If Demo was about coming of age, this was about coming of *middle* age. Really, John didn't have a coming of age since his teens were interrupted by early parenthood and marriage, raising children and so forth. I am not one who believes that having children makes us more mature or grown up it just makes us immature with responsibilities (no pot-calling-the-kettle-stainless-steel, here). So I would almost say this is his delayed coming of age. Where he's not exactly having a midlife crisis as he is coming into his adulthood. Ach, all this just brings me into thinking about what possibly constitutes a coming of age 'ritual' in our society today.

Oh well, I've no answer there.

I've told a lot of people about a culture somewhere (I remember it being from a small island in Japan but that's unverified so...) where you are considered a child until you are 55, at which point you are old enough to be adult, have your life together and be responsible. Old age is when you are actually quite old say, past 80. So, we have a long time to figure it out, kids, and then 25 years or so of adulthood.

Relax.

And, try not to blow your life up in the process.

Mark Victor Young says

Great feeling of verisimilitude to this quasi-autobiographical work of fiction. It's the story of a 40-year old remarried father of 3 who has a new baby son with his second (younger) wife and a full-blown crisis on the way. Also in crisis is children's entertainer Sherri Smalls, with whom the main character becomes smitten. Not enough going on in his life, I guess. There was genuine humour in his self-loathing, crusty persona and the cataloguing of his many faults. Good characters and a good story overall.

Where I did have a few quibbles with this work was in the graphic side of this graphic novel. The art itself is fine. Some funny expressions and gestures were well-captured. But the heavy inks were just overpowering. And the lettering was just terrible, often intelligible only thanks to context. He uses a mixture of upper and lower case letters throughout like he's a beatnik poet and actually underlines words for emphasis like he's

signing someone's high school yearbook. No! Wrong! Bad cartoonist!

Ollman's storytelling skills are all there and I like his drawing style, but he is taking on too many of the art chores here and the work suffers because of it. He needs an inker and a letterer to let his characters breathe.

Hannah Garden says

So this is the story of a 40-year old guy who is having a hard time because his body is not as erotic to young women as it used to be, he's got a shitty non-relationship with his ex-wife, strained relationships with his adult daughters from that marriage, is acting like a butt to his new wife, who is younger and with whom he has a baby, and isn't feeling super compelled about his work, which is showing up in his performance and causing the bosses to mention it to him.

Secondary storyline is a children's television performer named Sherri who is frustrated because she wants to be one kind of musician but is getting paid to be another, her costar is her ex with whom she has a strained relationship, and she can't find love. She's maybe thirty at the oldest.

Protagonist duder takes notice of secondary storyline Sherri via his baby son's DVD and pursues her, ultimately thankfully fruitlessly, in a way that is creepy, sad, and just. so. fucking. boring.

It's not a bad book and it's not without its relative charms but man there's just nothing doing here for me. I feel like if you like Maron maybe you will like this book but I find Maron to be a stiff bitter cheese of self-absorption bloating untemptingly over the cold cramped edges of a souffle dish better served by a thorough scrape & soak.

There's no redemption, and no real consequences. Duder starts out as a miserable shit and ends as one. Meh.

Mary Shyne says

A somewhat refreshing, definitely more self-aware take on the American male indie comics confessional.

Courtney says

Partly fictionalized telling of his mid-life realizations, mixed in were a woman's own and thoughts and regrets. Not sure what I was expecting, there was some honesty here, but also nothing surprising or novel, which may have been the point...

Raina says

I was surprised at how much I liked this.

I mean, there are a few fictionalized, torn-from-life, graphic novels about flailing, aging cartoonists out there.

And maybe, if that was all this was, I'd let my star rating rest at 3*.

But then he throws in the Death to Smoochy factor.
And that was the part that I cared about.

As far as execution goes, he uses the 9-panel layout serviceably, effectively. His illustrations bring to mind a toned-down, more angular, more accessible Derf Backderf for me.

I'm not sure I'll find this particularly memorable, but I always like being surprised by goodness. :)

Oh yeah, and, I'm including this as a GNTravelogue bc it includes a trip to NYC.

*This is probably more like 3.5 in life, and bear in mind that I'm not one of those reviewers who constantly complain at the lack of half-star options.

Jennp says

This was one of those books just found by accident. You know, that whole "I'm standing in the far end of the library trying to kill time because we trade off on who gets to look for books and who sits in the kid section reading ZOOLIFE magazine to the almost-four-year-old" kind of moment. So as a stumbled upon book, I was very impressed with this find. He got me from the very start. A man surrounded by poop, cats, diapers, litter boxes, feet-killing toys, a house that needs *real* cleaning, an art/creative space that hasn't been touched in months, and all the whispered thoughts of "dear god how did I arrive at this moment?"

I figure this book really won me over because Ollman put to paper a very representative collection of the thoughts that run through many parents' heads as they try to figure out kids and love and career and creative-me-time. (Semi-Spoilerish from here on) Plus the whole running shorts "LOOK AT YOURSELF NOW!" moment was so spot on. The situations and interactions ran true. And I never felt overwhelmed by negativity. It walked that line, but I think he kept me in a feeling of commiseration rather than utter failure. I mean, lots of failure -- but not *utter* failure.

David Schaafsma says

This is the first novel by the author of the short story collection, Happy Stories about Well-Adjusted People, which I loved. I like his work in the short form better, as misery works better short than long, I think. And it's always misery, with a sense of humor, for Ollmann. It's like Woody Allen, anhedonia, though the tone is slightly different. More harsh, a little less funny, though still funny, at times. Bracingly honest. This is in the area of Joe Matt's Spent and Chester Brown's Paying For It, Crumb's My Trouble with Women and Clowes' Wilson, harsh honest looks at men who are in few ways really admirable or even very likeable, but in the process, I, for one, come to like these guys, or some aspects of their honesty, or confessions. I liked Ollmann's John, as a character, not as a person so much, though I have also had my down times, my struggles, my crises, mid-life and otherwise, so can relate to him.

This is fiction, Ollmann tells us, but he also makes clear it is very autobiographical. He admits in the acknowledgments that he did actually have a crush on an actual children's music performer that forms the basis for this tale. This story takes a risk and uses an alternating perspective format, going from John--editor, remarried, with two adult daughters and a baby with his young wife--and Sherri, the musician, struggling with a sleazy ex and whether she wants a love life and a career, and for me this alternation works well, I come to like both of them, and while Sherri is more likeable, both seem real and vulnerable, flawed, well-meaning generally. The point is that John is as sometimes happens to him close to crashing and burning. He drinks a lot, and is screwing up in his job, and he's struggling with anger as he tries to love his new wife and the baby, but he's mid-life, 40, and this is hard for him, boo hoo, his life isn't what he wanted exactly, so what?

So John has this crush on Sherri, mainly in his own head, looking at her website/bio, listening to her music, which he discovered in showing it to his son. When he happens to be in NYC, as she is, they go out for a night on the pretense that he will interview her, but then lies to her about his marriage status, flirting with her, the jerk. But people do this, the divorce rate is 50%, people are jerks, so you get the feel for a real person, not a fictional saint, who is struggling. And the honesty is actually darkly funny, finally. And not much happens in this story, actually. It's really more a reflection on stupid mistakes people make or could make rather than some big dramatic Hollywood story. It's closer to slice of life, though one could see Seth Rogen playing the part of the guy in a Judd Apatow film of it.

I see a lot of people dislike this book, giving it a low rating, and I can see why: They don't like John, he's kind of a jerk, and why read about jerks, they want happier endings about nicer people. But this is literature about real people, so it's about telling the truth, and the craft of that, so I say it's fine comics work, done well, with grit and grime and humor.

Derek Royal says

I enjoyed this, Joe Ollmann's first graphic novel...with an underscore on "novel." I'm familiar with his shorter pieces, I guess what one would call the short-story equivalent to the "graphic novel." His longer-form narrative is similar to style/characteristics he employs in *Happy Stories about Well-Adjusted People*, but I can tell that the more sustained format required different kinds of storytelling strategies. The most noticeable one is his use of two different narrators (or focalizers?) in the story: John and Sherry. When the latter came into the mix, it threw me at first -- again, being used to Ollmann's shorter-form storytelling where he assumes the voice of one particular character or consciousness -- but then I understood where he was going and got used to the dual style. Did it work? Yes, I think it succeeded. But I came away from *Mid-Life* still thinking that the story was tilted heavily in favor of John...which makes sense, since (as Ollmann admits) parts of this are based on the creator's own life. But with the split narrators, I'd expected equal time for Sherry. And the fact that the book begins and ends with John and his dilemma, there emphasis is clearly place on him. Still, Ollmann has to end with one character, so it makes sense that it be the one that is more closely linked to the author. As a result, John is the one we have the most access to and can sympathize with more.

Tim says

Usually when I rate a book this low I have very clear reasons. I'm not sure what it is about this book that I hated so much, so I'm going to use this review as a way to process it.

1. The main plot point re: potential infidelity just didn't seem to work throughout the book.
2. He started some subplots (work harassment piece) that just died off, or were used for other purposes later, but not in a way to justify the amount of time devoted to establishing them.
3. It starts out as something of a book on middle-aged parenting, but then the plot narrows so dramatically.
4. He isn't exactly a likeable person. Likeability certainly isn't a requirement, obviously, but he positions the main character as someone the reader is supposed to relate to, but then spends the rest of the book presenting him in a way that undermines that.

Dunno...like the 9 panel framing, it just started feeling repetitive and monotonous at a certain point.

David Stewart says

This is a strange graphic novel. It is, as the title would suggest, about a man in the middle of his life. He's forty years old, once divorced and remarried, and has recently birthed a third child with his new wife, their first child. The mid-life crisis story is one that's been told a thousand or more times, but there is a genuine quality to the tale in Ollman's view of things, and it's clear that if this isn't largely biographical, that it at least draws many parallels to his own life.

The story itself follows a man named John and his struggles with the more mundane aspects of his life and the temptations he finds outside of it. I'm not sure it really goes beyond that, and any drama that exists is largely in his own head. The story also follows Sherri, a children's performer derivative of Raffi, who once had a promising star as an actual musician. The stories are related and eventually come together, but, much like in reality, very little actually comes of any of it. In the end, the feeling a reader is left with is one of stagnation almost. The problem posed here was that of middle age, but nothing was done about it. The value of a mid-life crisis in my eyes is that it gives a man or woman a chance to evaluate their options and to make changes, but neither character in this book does that, and to me a large part of telling a good story is showing how characters change. I suppose some will argue that they did change, and even if they didn't, the book ends too abruptly for them to change and so we don't really see if they could or did. Maybe that's true. I just didn't feel particularly satisfied with how everything stopped.

Regardless, worth a read, even if the art style is a little visually disgusting at times.

Matt Graupman says

Finding yourself at the mid-point of your life can be an unsettling prospect and John, the protagonist of Joe Ollmann's wonderful semi-autobiographical comic "Mid-Life," is struggling with the idea. Remarried to a younger woman, with a new baby in addition to a pair of adult daughters, rapidly losing his physique, and floundering at work, John questions all the decisions that led him to this stage of his life, ultimately focusing his fantasies for a better life on Sherry Smalls, the pretty singer his infant son listens to. But can fantasies really live up to reality? That's the question that Ollmann skillfully explores.

I'm shocked that I hadn't heard of Joe Ollmann before, that he's not a bigger name in comics. Maybe he's more popular in his native Canada? Regardless, his comics show a level of talent that puts him in league with the best in the business. Employing an unusually rigid 9-panel structure, his pages are full of grotesquely funny characters, or perhaps it's just middle-age that's grotesquely funny? The story is paced beautifully and

his characters are real flesh-and-blood people, not just rote stereotypes; I found myself immediately sucked into their lives. Sometimes you'll root for John, sometimes curse him, but he's always interesting (though the true star of the book is Sherry).

"Mid-Life" could've gone wrong in so many ways but Ollmann keeps it all together, crafting a sentimental tale that doesn't pretend to have all the answers. Sometimes life doesn't work out the way you expected, whether you're a forty-year-old man or a twenty-something young lady. It's a fairly common theme in comics but Ollmann elevates it to a sloppy but endearing work of art.

Scruffy says

If you've read more than a couple of autobiographical comics or seen any Woody Allen movies the plot of Mid-Life will seem quite familiar to you. 40 year old John is having a mid-life crisis. He's just become a father again with his young second wife, he doesn't have a great relationship with his first two daughters and he is becoming irrelevant at work. As his problems multiply he feels sorry for himself and starts looking at younger women thinking he might be happier with them. This kind of story has been told lots of times many different ways so it's surprising that Joe Ollmann manages to make it seem new and interesting.

He has a unique voice with quite a dark sense of humour. John's world is populated with quirky and believable characters that are fleshed out very well within a short space of time. Although his writing is dense with a heavy use of narration the story moves along quite quickly with short chapters moving us from scene to scene. Part of the story is told from the perspective of Sherry, a children's entertainer who John becomes infatuated with. She is at a similar point in her life and seems to have just as many problems as John. The biggest thing that separates Mid-Life from other comics of this type is Sherry's story. It's interesting to see a similar set of issues from a female perspective.

Ollmann has a rough art style that uses lots of thick lines and heavy shading. It's also extremely detailed which can sometimes make for uncomfortable scenes. The size of his characters heads is slightly exaggerated with some of the most expressive faces I've seen in comics. My only real complaint is the lettering which is a bit too rough. Sometimes too many words are squeezed in to captions which are too small. The inconsistency does make the comic seem more personal which I like but it is sometimes hard to read.

That one small criticism aside though I thought Mid-Life was excellent. Joe Ollmann gave a unique perspective on a well-worn story and added enough personality to make me forget that the plot is quite familiar.

For more of my reviews please visit <http://www.scruffyfiction.co.uk>

Scott says

I often don't go for the "alternative" comics because most of the time, the art is just plain ugly (I guess I'm superficial for expecting artists to draw better than myself). I gave this one a shot though because it is about a 40-year old (who acts and looks like he's 50) who is going through some mid-life issues. Married at 17, divorced once, has two grown daughters, remarried, new baby. In short period between the two marriages, he

spent an ample amount of time on drugs, booze, and one-night stands. It also focuses on a 30 year old former garage band singer who is adjusting to her career in children's entertainment. Frankly the protagonist is kind of an asshole who understands this about himself while allowing the reader to empathize with our own asshole moments. So the book is about growing up after you've grown up. It's painfully honest from all angles, and while the honesty can be ugly (like the art), it is quite refreshing (the art grows on you too). It's not so much of a mid-life crisis (an ignorant term of the psychologically lazy, in my opinion) as a coming to terms with the things you've always wanted, the things you have, and the things you will no longer get.
