



Summer of Shifts

Dr Denise Taylor

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A Companion to Stepping Back Without Losing Yourself

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Rethinking Retirement and ThriveSpan

Created: 1 November 2025

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A Note from Denise

A welcome to this guide and the story behind it.



This is a different kind of writing for me. For years, my work has been practical: coaching, research, and books to help people navigate careers and retirement. This guide comes from a more personal place.

It grew out of a summer when life asked me to stop, to shed, and to listen inwardly.

What you'll find here isn't a programme or a set of instructions. It's a story of transition — my own — told as honestly as I know how, with space for you to pause and reflect on your own journey alongside mine.

Thank you for choosing to spend time here. May these pages offer gentle companionship as you explore what matters most in your own season of change.

Denise x

Prelude to Summer of Shifts

Reflections from my 67th year, a time of endings, grounding, and rediscovery.

Under the Surface: When Steadiness Feels Fragile

Much of my 67th year was steady on the surface, but unsettled underneath.

I carried too much of the emotional load in my relationship, and some friendships proved more draining than nourishing.

By spring, I was finding steadiness again through fitness and small, practical choices, but still holding weight that wasn't mine to carry.

The final two months of being 67 changed everything. My relationship ended, and the woodland became fully mine.

It was a relief to lay down the emotional burden. Managing the wood alone brought its own challenges, yet there was peace in knowing it was truly my space. That shift opened the way for reflection, and for what I came to call *the Summer of Shifts*.



Intro: A Season of Unravelling and Becoming

Something final settled in the air



The summer of 2025 will always stand apart in my memory. On Saturday 7 June, a long relationship ended. It hadn't come out of nowhere; the weeks leading up to it had carried signs of unease, but when the words were spoken, something final settled in the air.

In the days and weeks that followed, I kept moving: to gigs, to festivals, to my woodland, to my desk. On the surface, life went on. Yet inside, I was navigating grief, confusion, and exhaustion. At times I felt raw and untethered, as if everyone else was walking in sunlight while I stumbled through fog.

And yet, through that same summer, something else began to stir, a gentler rhythm, a different way of listening to myself, the first glimpse of what it might mean to step back without losing who I am.

What follows is not a neat story but a companion to [Stepping Back Without Losing Yourself](#). There, I wrote about the concept of stepping back. Here, I share how it unfolded in lived experience, through heartbreak, reflection, festivals, woodland time, and small acts of recalibration.

June: Endings and First Waves

The Sound of Sadness in a Crowd



The ending came on Saturday 7 June. I had known something was fraying in the days before; silences that lasted too long, words that didn't land right, but when it was spoken aloud, it left me hollow. The air felt heavier. My body seemed braced for something it still couldn't quite absorb.

And yet, life went on. Six days later, on Friday 13 June, I was in Plymouth watching Pendulum. The music was loud, the bassline relentless, the crowd pulsing with energy. Lights strobed, bodies jumped, arms raised in the air. I stood among them, but apart. It was as if the sound hit me from a distance, the rhythms pounding against a wall I couldn't lower. Everyone else seemed caught in euphoria, but I couldn't quite reach it. I was alone, and I noticed that acutely. It sharpened the edge of sadness.

The following Friday, 20 June, I went with a friend to the Food and Drink Festival. Sunlight, chatter, the smell of cooked food and spices filled the air. Geoffrey was

happy, enjoying the stalls and wine, the music drifting from the stage. I smiled, joined in, but I carried my sadness like a shadow. I was there in body but split inside, half moving through the festival, half replaying conversations that were already past.

Grief entered quietly, then stayed long enough to teach me how to listen.

On 28 June, I had professional photographs taken at my wood. I'd been looking forward to it, the clothes chosen, the light right. I smiled as asked, but beneath the surface I wasn't in my best space. Looking back now, I see it: the effort of holding myself together.



In the wood, something began to shift. Words rose into my articles. On 19 June I shared *The Wisdom We Carry*:

"Have you ever paused to consider that you are every age you've ever been? We carry within us the child, the student, the activist, the parent, the midlife wanderer.

We remember how it felt to make bold choices, to live through heartbreaks and breakthroughs, and to wonder who we might yet become."

Even in grief, this felt true. Eldership wasn't something bestowed; it was something lived, emerging as we carried all our ages within us.

On 26 June, I wrote *Finding Balance*, shaped by time in the woodland, shifting logs and clearing paths:

"For me, balance isn't about doing less. It's about doing differently. About moving between brain and body, intensity and rest, solitude and connection. When life starts to feel tilted: too much screen time, too many deadlines, too many shoulds, nature calls me back to centre."

That week, nature became more than backdrop. It became a way to feel steady again.



But grief doesn't always move through words alone. It found its way into my body. On 30 June, I wrote *The Stress We Carry*:

"This past week, I've had shooting pain in my back, tendon pain in my elbow, tightness across my side. Small things, perhaps, but they're telling a bigger story, one about how the body keeps score."

My trainer swapped weights for massage, pressing into the knots I hadn't realised were there. The pain released into tears.

"At the end, as we moved through stretches, I said quietly, 'I feel a bit tearful.' She nodded. 'A lot of stress has been released.'"

I cried afterwards in the car. The tears were for the relationship ending, but not only for him. The death of a younger friend, old memories resurfacing, grief has a way of layering itself, one loss pulling at the threads of another.

June became the month of endings, but also of reckonings. My body, my words, and my woodland all conspired to remind me that I couldn't simply push on. This was a time to pause, to listen, to let grief take its place.

July: Festivals, Pressure, and Pause

Carrying Too Many Possibilities



July arrived with music. From 9–12 July I was at 2000 Trees, a festival filled with sound and energy. Stages pulsed with guitars, drums thundered, and crowds surged with excitement. I watched, sometimes letting myself be carried by the rhythm, other times feeling the sharp contrast between their exuberance and the sadness I carried.

Surrounded by thousands of people, I felt alone. Music has always been a balm for me, but this time it was complicated. The songs filled my chest, but grief lived there too.

On Friday 18 July I went walking with a friend. A quieter day, steady footsteps on a familiar path, conversation meandering. But even there, with kindness beside me, sadness surfaced, a reminder that grief doesn't disappear with distraction. It sits, waiting.



That same week I wrote *Still Expanding* (14 July), an attempt to make sense of a different kind of pressure, not deadlines, but possibility itself.

"There's a particular kind of overwhelm I've known for years. Not the pressure of deadlines or demands, but something quieter, the weight of ideas. Of noticing what could be done and feeling pulled in a dozen directions at once. Folders still multiply. Creative tools still call to me. There's a part of me that still sees potential in everything, and sometimes that's wonderful. But sometimes it's exhausting."

Being part of a couple had once softened that load. Evenings spent together brought a sense of "enough." Now, single again, that feeling vanished. I noticed the mental load creeping back, the endless pull to do more, produce more, prove more.

In *Still Expanding*, I named what ageing had begun to teach me:

"One of the quiet truths of ageing is that we don't always feel done. We're still growing, still imagining, still expanding, even as our energy, health, or circumstances shift."

And yet, part of ageing well (at least for me) is learning to carry this possibility differently."

Later that month, I tried to lean into that truth. In *A New Start, at Any Time* (21 July), I reminded myself that change needn't wait for the calendar to turn.

"We can choose a new start at any time. Not just at New Year, not only when life forces our hand, but on any ordinary morning when something inside us whispers, things could be different."

I asked myself: What would my future self thank me for? What would she regret if I didn't act? These questions had guided me before, ending a marriage that no longer fit, beginning strength training in my 60s, travelling adventurously in midlife. They could guide me again.

At the end of the month came *Silver Sky Festival* (25–27 July). I had hoped for stimulation, connection, new energy. Instead, I felt out of place. The sadness was still with me, and being surrounded by others only sharpened the sense of dislocation.

But in that moment, I did something different. I gave myself permission to leave early, not because I couldn't cope, but because I was listening to myself. It was an act of care, not failure.

"For once, I wasn't trying to match the world's season. I was honouring my own."



That choice became the heart of *Clearing the Path* (28 July):

"On the calendar, it's summer, long days, social energy, growth. But inside, it feels like early autumn. A turning inward. A need to gather, not scatter."

I considered many other things that summer: visiting a Buddhist centre, joining walking groups, returning to ceilidhs. All tempting in their own way, but in the end I realised what I needed most was time for me. To focus on my own ground, rather than scatter my energy among too many people or places.

In my *ThriveSpan* framework for later life, there are nine core dimensions. Right now, I was drawn unmistakably to the first path: *Wellbeing & Rhythm*. Not contribution. Not growth. Not legacy. But the basics: health, nervous system balance, emotional steadiness, and the simple grounding of being in my body.

July was still heavy, but by leaving early, by asking different questions, I began to learn that stepping back could be an act of wisdom.



August: Settling and Reorienting

Fifty-Two Years of Work, and Now, a Pause

In August, something significant happened: I held the first Vision Quest on my own land. A full ten-day rite of passage with a single participant who had reached out to me not only because I am a trained wilderness rites of passage guide, but because of the wider background I bring: psychology, deep imagery, and years of research into meaningful ageing.



It was beautiful to do this in my woodland, to hold the space for one person as she stepped away from daily life and into solitude with the trees. Supporting her journey made me realise, more deeply than before, that this is where I want to be placing my energy. Allowing individuals to come into the wood, to find themselves in that quiet space, feels like the most natural extension of my own path.

Holding Space

People often imagine that time in the woodland is restful, but holding the space is very different. It means staying fully present while someone else does deep personal work, quietly safeguarding the process, attending to both land and person, and holding steadiness so they can let go. It looks calm from the outside, but it takes energy, focus, and heart.

August opened with another festival. From 7–10 August I was at Lakefest, surrounded by fields alive with music, food stalls, and the energy of summer. There were moments of real joy - a guitar riff that caught me, the warmth of a conversation, laughter spilling out in the beer tent. Yet sadness still walked beside me. Festivals, with their colour and noise, made the contrast sharper: outward celebration, inward grief. I could dance for a moment, but then the quiet ache returned.

Fifty-Two Years of Work, and Now, a Pause

This festival came just days after I had marked another milestone: fifty-two years since starting work. On 30 July I had written *52 Years Since I Started Work, and Now, a Pause*, a piece that carried the weight of decades.

"It was just before my 16th birthday. I'd finished school, taken their psychometric tests, and, unlike the other school leavers who went into the post room, I was placed in Finance.

It's been a long journey. Apart from brief maternity breaks, I've worked ever since. That's 50 years of National Insurance contributions. No wonder I feel the call to pause."

Looking back over half a century of working life, I could see how continuous it had been. There were short maternity breaks, but otherwise a straight line of employment, self-employment, consultancy, and writing, always contributing, always producing. I sometimes wonder what might have been different if I had taken a gap year, gone to university full-time, or stepped away mid-career. But the truth is, I didn't. My life was marked by steady striving.

Perhaps that is why the grief of this summer cut so deeply. It wasn't just the end of a relationship; it was also a reckoning with a lifetime of doing. I had reached a point where my body, my emotions, and my history were all telling me: pause.

By late August, I could put words to that shift. In *Late 60s and Letting Things Settle* (25 August), I wrote:

"There's a phase of life where we've done a lot. We've built, achieved, experimented, stretched ourselves. And then comes a time to slow the pace; not out of resignation, but out of choice. To be the person we are now, not the person we were five, ten, or even three years ago."



The phrase “*late 60s*” landed with quiet finality. Reading it in my publisher’s description of me had startled me, I was approaching 68 but somehow the words felt like a threshold. Yet as I sat with them, I found acceptance. This wasn’t about decline. It was about realignment.

Leaning into Spaciousness

In that same piece, I wrote of shifting from expansion to spaciousness. For so long I had pursued growth: more work, more projects, more contribution. Now I felt the pull to consolidate, to choose carefully, to give myself room to breathe.

“I no longer feel the pull to chase the next big thing. Instead, I’m drawn to consolidate, to make space for what matters most now. It means leaning into spaciousness and depth rather than expansion. It means shaping the next chapter of life with care, so it fits who I am now.”

August became a month of laying things down, consigning projects to the recycling pile, clearing folders filled with unused material, loosening the constant need to do more. In their place, I began to let stillness in. It wasn’t easy; I still carried sadness, still felt the ache of endings. But alongside the grief, there was relief, a sense that I didn’t have to keep striving, that I could let things settle.

Festivals gave me music and laughter. Reflection gave me clarity. And together they carried me toward a different kind of rhythm.



Turning Points and Blessings

My birthday on 29 August became a turning point. I spent the morning in my woodland, returning to the rhythm I had chosen at 65: reflection among the trees. It wasn't about looking back or forward, but reading, with care, what others had offered me. Friends had sent poems, blessings, and memories. I carried their words with me into the quiet.

My sister reminded me of my teenage years, when at 17 I was working in London. She recalled visiting with our parents and me taking her to see Emerson, Lake and Palmer at Earl's Court. I remembered the concert, but had forgotten the detail she added, that afterwards I introduced her to friends and casually mentioned that one had once played with Traffic. It made me laugh: a glimpse of my younger self I wouldn't have recalled without her.

Others offered different gifts. A friend spoke of my second Vision Quest, when the rain poured without ceasing and I trudged into the mud, rain gear pulled tight, refusing to leave. "*You get the weather you need,*" I had said then, and she reminded me of it now. Younger friends, some 15 years my junior, told me I inspired them, not with grand gestures but by showing that ageing need not be feared, that life could still be lived with curiosity and energy.

Their words mattered. Too often, we don't hear how our lives have touched others. Birthdays, especially ones spent in reflection, create space for those truths to return. I gathered their stories like firewood, adding them to the fabric of my own.

That evening, I shifted from solitude to celebration. Geoffrey and I went to the Swan for live music. The pub was full of energy - guitars and drums filling the room, strangers moving together in rhythm. I chatted with people I barely knew, ten or so conversations over the evening. For an introvert, it was a lot, and by the end I was ready for quiet again. But I felt enlivened.

The balance of that day: solitude in the wood, celebration at the Swan, felt like a marker of where I was moving.

"It reminded me that both are needed: silence and story, solitude and community, reflection and celebration."

This became the texture of September; grief still present, but now accompanied by gratitude.



September: Gratitude and Reorientation

When Gratitude Steps Forward

By September, the sharpness of grief had softened. It hadn't vanished, but it no longer pressed so heavily on my chest. There was more space. More air.



By mid-September, that gratitude had become my anchor. In *Gratitude and New Directions* (13 September), I thanked my growing community of readers, nearly 2,000 subscribers, and 21 paid supporters. I spoke of learning to pace myself differently in later life, of letting go of pressure and choosing carefully where to place my energy.

My books became my anchor through it all: one in production, another half-shaped, a third emerging at the edges of my imagination. They reminded me that my energy was best placed in what truly mattered to me, not in scattering it thinly.

I also named the changes ahead. I was stepping back from career coaching, not in resentment, but in recognition that my heart was moving elsewhere. I was preparing for the release of *Career Coaching for Midlife and Beyond*, while also tending to *ThriveSpan* and *Olderhood Unfolding*. Even a woodland-inspired dystopian novel had begun to form in my imagination, already past 60,000 words.

These shifts felt aligned with the season. Summer had been full of grief, pressure, festivals, and recalibration. September arrived with more clarity, a sense of what to set down, and where to place my attention next.

Grief hadn't gone. It still flared at unexpected moments, but it no longer defined the whole season. Gratitude had stepped forward, not as a replacement, but as a companion. The two could sit side by side.

September became the month of reorientation; of claiming space, of acknowledging endings, and of stepping toward what comes next.



October: Grounding and Integration

Letting Quiet Become the Teacher

A month for steady ground, quiet confidence, and small completions.

After months of movement and emotional weather, October arrived with stillness. The pace softened. I was no longer processing endings, only living the aftermath; not as loss, but as alignment.

I had been speaking, writing, and reflecting on the idea of stepping back for months, yet it was only now that I understood what that really meant. It wasn't retreat, or withdrawal. It was redirection: toward presence, depth, and a rhythm that felt truer for this stage of life.

"Stepping back isn't giving up. It's choosing a rhythm that fits who we've become."

At the woodland, autumn had taken hold. Mornings were cooler, the light gentler, the air filled with that quiet scent of change. I watched as the trees began to release what they no longer needed. Their letting go wasn't collapse, but renewal. Leaves fell not as waste, but as nourishment, the woodland's own act of generosity.

Standing there, I thought about how ageing can mirror that process. The work now is not about striving for endless growth but tending the inner soil, ensuring that what we've gathered over the years becomes fertile ground for whatever comes next.

"Vitality in later life doesn't come from constant growth, but from regeneration."

Throughout October I found myself saying no more easily. Not from resistance, but from clarity. I turned down extra work, delayed a playlist project, left emails unanswered for a day or two. The world didn't end; in fact, it expanded slightly. Space returned.

Evenings brought films, quiet reflection, and the small pleasure of solitude, a reminder that purpose doesn't always arrive through noise or productivity. Watching *I Swear*, a film about a man who turned struggle into service, I recognised something in myself: how pain, once integrated, becomes compassion.

"Sometimes our gift to others is simply how we've learned to live with what we can't fix."

The Second Vision Quest

Mid-month, I held another Vision Quest at the wood, this time even quieter, just one participant again, and the land already deep into autumn. The experience felt different from August's. The air was colder, the light softer, the sense of introspection stronger.

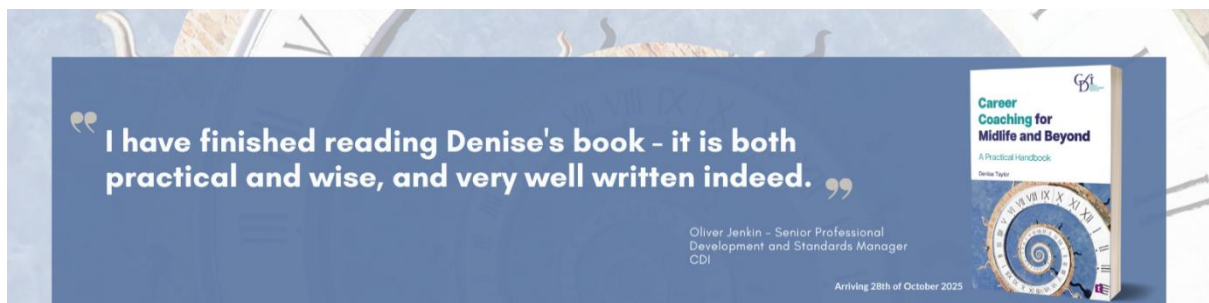
This second Quest confirmed something I had been sensing all along: that the woodland isn't just a place I own, but a living presence I work alongside. Each participant brings their own story, but the land shapes what unfolds. My role is simply to hold the perimeter, to keep the fire, the rhythm, and the trust alive while nature does her work.

I noticed how much calmer I felt this time. Less anxious about logistics, more attuned to rhythm. I slept more deeply, ate more slowly, and found peace in the small rituals: lighting the fire, checking the tents, sitting in the hush before dawn.

"Holding space isn't about effort; it's about steadiness."

That realisation stayed with me. The Quest, like the trees around us, reminded me that maturity brings not just knowledge but presence, a capacity to hold others without losing ourselves.

9th Book Launch



Late October came the book launch, *Career Coaching for Midlife and Beyond* finally in the world. The culmination of decades of work, it also marked a threshold. I could feel the shift from striving to grounding. The satisfaction wasn't

loud or performative. It was the quiet knowing that something had been completed, and that I could now step more fully into what's next.

By the end of the month, I noticed a new steadiness. I was back in rhythm with the woodland - pruning, clearing, preparing for winter. My world had simplified. The edges between work, rest, and reflection had blurred into something more natural, more sustainable.

"The wood never hurries. It simply knows what to release, and when."

October became a month of integration; a gathering-in before the long exhale of winter. The emotional arc that began in June had come full circle: from unravelling to becoming, from loss to rootedness.

And so, as the season turned, I realised that the true work of stepping back is not to pause life, but to let life settle around us differently. To live more quietly, more consciously, and with gratitude for the simple fact of being here, still unfolding.



Bridging Reflection: From Stillness to Continuity

As October closed, I sensed a quiet coherence between the inner and outer worlds. The trees had let go of their leaves, and I had laid down my own excess: projects, expectations, patterns of overdoing.

It felt less like an ending than a rebalancing. The months of grief, adjustment, and learning had settled into a gentler rhythm. What began as survival had become steadiness.

In this stillness, I understood that stepping back isn't a single act but an ongoing practice, a way of staying attuned to what needs attention and what can be released. The summer had unravelled me; autumn helped me weave myself back together.

Now, as the days shorten and the woodland turns inward, I find myself doing the same. The work continues, but from a steadier ground.



Closing Reflection: From Endings to Alignment

The Weaving of a Summer

Looking back, the summer wasn't a neat arc but a weaving; a breakup, festivals, woodland days, and tears shed in unexpected places.

I see now that stepping back isn't a single act. It's a process. Sometimes it comes through a sharp moment: the end of a relationship, the release of knots in a trainer's hands. Other times it comes through small choices: leaving a festival early, sitting quietly in the wood, letting "late 60s" settle into your bones.

My Guide [*Stepping Back Without Losing Yourself*](#) offers the framework. *Summer of Shifts* shows the lived reality: uneven, embodied, sometimes painful, but ultimately restorative.

If you are in your own season of shifts, may you let it be what it is, messy, imperfect, full of both grief and grace. Endings hurt, but they can also become the soil from which new beginnings slowly grow.

Moving On from Amazing People

Closing one chapter to make space for the next.

For almost thirty years, *Amazing People* was a hub for career coaching resources, articles, and guidance. It grew to house more than 1,000 blog posts and reached thousands of readers.

Closing or passing on this site is part of the same journey explored in this guide, letting go of what no longer fits to create room for what wants to emerge next.

You can now find my writing and updates at DeniseTaylor.co.uk and through my Substack, [*Ageing Reimagined*](#), where I share reflections on later life, woodland diaries, and the unfolding of new work.

An Ongoing Invitation

A reminder that your story, too, is still unfolding.

This guide is not a full stop. It's a comma; a pause to take stock before moving on. My hope is that by sharing my process more openly than I have before, others will feel permission to do the same.

There is no single path through later life, but there is always the possibility of re-storying who we are, and of living more fully aligned with what matters now.

For me, that has meant writing a kind of permission slip to myself: to rest without guilt, to go slowly when that feels right, and to shape life around what truly matters.

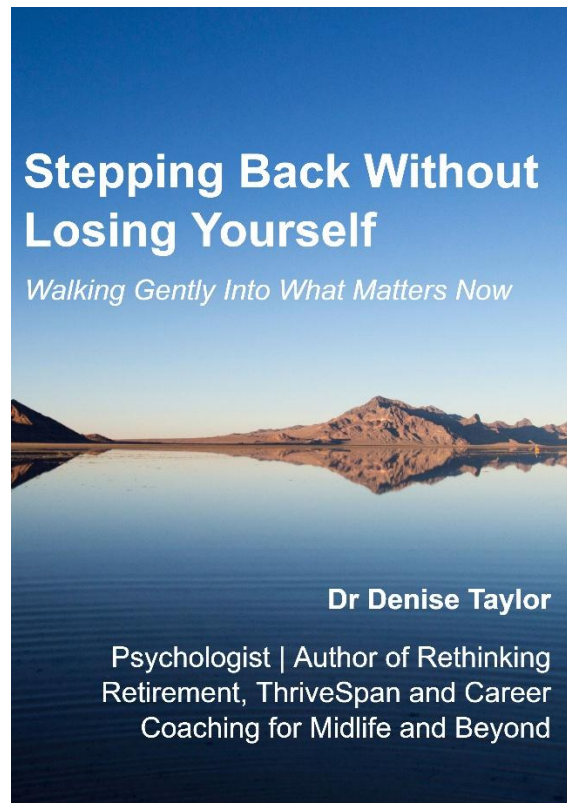
In that spirit, I see my role less as offering answers and more as being a bridge: between experience and possibility, between independence and community, between what has been and what comes next.

Part of being a bridge, for me, is listening across generations: offering what my years have taught, and learning from what younger people are facing in theirs.



Stepping Back Without Losing Yourself: Walking Gently Into What Matters Now.

A reflective guide for anyone navigating change in later life.



This [30-page guide](#) grew out of my own turning point, moving away from decades of striving and into a gentler, more spacious rhythm. It weaves together personal story, gentle insights, and reflection prompts to help you pause, rethink, and imagine your own next chapter.

It isn't a manual, but an invitation to step back without losing your sense of self, and to rediscover what matters most now.

It's a 6,600 word, 30 page PDF

Introductory price: £6 (for a limited time)

Standard price: £10

[Buy here](#) (free to paid Substack subscribers)

About the Author

Books and background — from careers to conscious later life.



Dr Denise Taylor is a Chartered Psychologist and author of nine books. Her most recent, *Career Coaching for Midlife and Beyond* (2025), represents the culmination of decades of work on careers, retirement, and transition.

Earlier titles include *Rethinking Retirement for Positive Ageing*. In 2026 she will publish two further books: *ThriveSpan: Walking Gently Into What Matters Now* and *Olderhood Unfolding*.

In this guide, Denise writes more personally from her own life, tracing the emotional and practical shifts of stepping back from full-on work into a more spacious and reflective phase.

Continue the Journey / Visit me online

If *The Summer of Shifts* resonated with you, you may also appreciate my latest reflective guide:

Stepping Back Without Losing Yourself: Walking Gently Into What Matters Now.

It grew from the same season of change, a quieter exploration of how we move from decades of striving into a more spacious, authentic rhythm of later life.

■ Available [here](#)

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May your own season of shifts bring you closer to what matters most.

