

18

The first time I was 18 I was inexperienced, untouched by the complicated emotions of physical intimacy and ignorant of the wants and needs of others, although I was unaware of it at the time.

The next time I was 18 I learned, rather crudely, that the satisfaction of long-frustrated desires did not always bring emotional fulfilment. Sometimes the consumption left you as empty as before.

The third time I was 18, I despaired for my future – that awesome gap of questionable years before me, and the thought of spending it alone.

The fourth time I was 18, I met someone equally afraid, and together we shut out the oppressing loneliness.

The fifth time I was 18, I redefined loneliness and wondered if I was still alone.

The sixth time I was 18, I pondered wrong choices and opportunities missed, wishing I had chosen other roads, but in the end knew that my choices were my own and could not have been different.

The seventh time I was 18, I accepted the limitations of life and accepted my role within it. I recognized that the hand we are dealt is the hand we play.

The eighth time I was 18, I celebrated my accomplishments, large and small, knowing intrinsically that they meant nothing to others.

The ninth time I was 18, I cried for friends and loved ones lost.

The last time I was 18, I had a stroke and realized, abruptly, that none of us can be 18 forever.