

# **HOW IT FEELS TO BE FIFTY**

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How it Feels to be Fifty by Ellis Parker Butler

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By

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

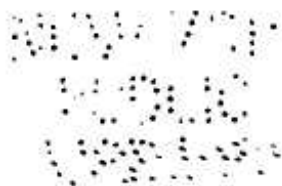
*Author of "Pigs is Pigs," "Goat-Feathers," "Philo Gubb  
Correspondence School Detective," etc.*



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*How it Feels to be Fifty*

## HOW IT FEELS TO BE FIFTY

**T**O tell you the honest truth,  
I am obliged to say that, if I  
had not been asked to write these  
few lines on "How it Feels to be  
Fifty," being fifty would n't have  
meant anything in my young life.

Of course this will be a terrible  
disappointment to the thousands of  
people who, for twenty-five years,  
have been counting off the months  
and days and hours and minutes,  
saying :

"In twenty-one years more he  
will be fifty; in ten months more  
he will be fifty; in eight minutes  
more he will be fifty! And *then* he

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will tell us how it feels, and we can absorb the knowledge from his wise old lips and get ready to feel as we ought to feel when we, too, are fifty."

It is a shame to disappoint such a large and intelligent audience, but I am compelled to state that I do not feel like a doddering old wreck teetering on the edge of the grave.

I remember a lovely underwear advertisement that depicted a sort of "cradle to grave" scene, with a toddling youngster at one end of the bridge of life and an aged man at the other end, and men of various progressive underwear ages scattered between. They were all arrayed in nice comfy underwear, and the bridge over which they



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were ambling was highest in the middle. It suggested that a man climbs up the bridge of life half his years and then goes down grade until he does n't need any more underwear, because of circumstances over which he has no control.

This bridge-of-life or hill-of-life idea, with its forty years up-hill and then forty years down-hill, is pure fake. If life were like that I would now be writing a sadly introspective farewell ode, telling how I had reached the apex of life's hill and now saw before me the long slope down into the valley, toward the river all must cross.

I would ring in something about the setting sun and the cooing of the turtle doves in the neat little ceme-

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tery at the foot of the hill, and then say I was shouldering my heavy pack with hope and resignation for the final weary down-hill hike. I would add something about being footsore, about spent talents and honorable gray hairs, and everybody would weep and begin to save up money for a floral funeral wreath for me.

The fact is that, except for the almanac, I don't know whether I am fifty or twenty. Judged by the way I feel to-day, I shall keep right on going up-hill, until — it may be a thousand years from now — I come to a jumping-off place.

At fifty I have no feeling of starting down-hill, or of having reached the top of any hill. If you want to

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call my life a hill, I'll say I see the road rising just as steadily and regularly and pleasantly ahead of me now as when I was twenty. And the top of it is so far from where I am now, and so much higher, that I can't even see it. Life is just beginning to be interesting.

At fifty I feel like a young teamster who has just got his skittish colts broken in and is now ready to start out on the real job. Until now I have been a raw hand, stopping to adjust the harness, talking about what I meant to do, studying the guide books, getting the stiff wagon greased, laying in provisions, fussing around one way and another trying to find out where I wanted to go, and why I wanted to go