

THE *Soul* EXPLORERS

BY CLAUDIA AND SERGIO LORDAO



When our son left home three years ago, we found ourselves at a crossroads. We were both 46 at the time and knew things would never be the same.

For years, we had been successfully swimming back and forth in our “comfort zone pool.” But with an empty nest and more free time on our hands, we had started to question ourselves.

After three decades working in marketing, our jobs were no longer fulfilling. We were bored and confused; feeling super young and extremely old at the same time. Something was missing—and it wasn't just our son.

Some people call it a middle-age crisis. We call it middle-age enlightenment. There was so much we wanted to do, to create and to share. Our minds were full of ideas and hopes. Our hearts were full of passion! But how could we change our lives? At this age and time?

For two years, we discussed our options, our fears, our future. In December 2017, we finally took a leap of faith and quit our jobs

to start an initiative called The Soul Explorers—a photographic storytelling project showcasing people from all walks of life.

It has been almost a year since The Soul Explorers hit the road. We've been to three continents, nine countries and more than 40 cities so far. We've conducted more than 250 interviews. And when we truly connect to total strangers, and they share their personal stories with us, we feel extremely rewarded.

Some people call us crazy. Maybe we are. We're funding the project ourselves, working a lot, travelling on a budget and making no money at all. And no, we're not rich. We just understood what's important to us now.

We know it's a big cliché, but life is, indeed, too short. And the older you get, the more evident that fact becomes.

Allow yourself to change, if that's what you want. Don't be afraid of trying and don't wait for the right time. There's no such thing. No matter how old you are, make a plan and then go for it. Stop postponing. Don't let “later” become “never.”

From Australia to the world, one story at a time.

Since we started The Soul Explorers project, we've been publishing a different story every day. In our travels, we come across people from all over the world and all walks of life. We talk about their struggles and hopes, their passions and fears. Regardless of their age, culture, language, gender or beliefs, they all want the same things: to be happy, to have a purpose in life and to be surrounded by loved ones.

Here is a selection of some of our favorite stories. Remember, we approached all these people on the streets. We asked them to share something personal with us – and here's how they responded.

Never Too Old

We came across Marianne on a beautiful day in Noosa, a paradise on earth in Australia. She was hiking with two friends and we loved what she said about aging:

I started hiking 20 years ago; I wish I'd started much earlier in life. I'm 76 now, and I'm making the most of it every day.

When you get older and especially when you're on your own—I'm a widow—it's very important to have friends around you and to socialize. The worst thing in the world is to sit home and do nothing and feel sorry for yourself.

We do a lot of walking. We ride our bikes, do yoga and go to the gym. Always have a coffee stop on the way—that's very important!

Aging is so unfair! I feel like I'm in my mid-30s. But I look in the mirror and go, 'Oh, God, I'd like to be a little younger than that!' My mind says I'm young, but my body says 'No, you're not.' But I try to be very active and keep myself as young as I can.

As you get older, some people think you're too old to do some things. No, you're not! You're never too old to start exercising. We can't stop aging, but we can definitely slow it down!"

Noosa, Australia



The Soldier

Sid was sitting by himself at Trafalgar Square in London, waiting for his family to arrive. His story surprised us. The more we travel, the more we learn not to judge a book by its cover:

My name is Sid, and I'm 64. I was in the Army for 12 years. The rigid discipline didn't bother me at all. I was used to it, as my dad was old-fashioned and very strict. But, to be honest, when you go into a war zone, discipline goes out the window. You don't need discipline to survive.

I've been to seven war zones and been shot three times. But I'm still here – Scottish men are hard to kill. I killed 87 people. You don't feel anything; you just go and blank your mind. You have to think it's a job. If you think about it any other way, you end up in a nuthouse.

London, England



Oporto, Portugal

The Portuguese Artist

We were walking down the alleyways of the historic city of Oporto, Portugal, when we came upon an open door. Inside, a woman was working on a painting. She welcomed us in with a sincere smile. Her name was Clara and she told us her life was divided into two stages:

The first stage took place in a competitive field. When I was 40, I was at the top of my game and decided to pursue my Ph.D., in addition to my job. Halfway through the program, my head went on a spiral. I knew if I continued, I'd follow that path forever.

In my 50s, I quit the doctorate to start the second stage of my life – a more humanistic, emotional and pleasurable period. I began my training in the arts, and two years ago, I had my first exhibition.

It's been a path of self-discovery. It isn't an easy process. I would have been very comfortable in my career if I'd continued. In today's world, to quit your job and start over is very difficult. To go against what they expect of us requires a lot of energy and a lot of courage.



Sense of Purpose

We were freezing when we came across Bill, who managed the Arthur's Seat Carpark in Edinburgh. He wasn't cold, like us. In fact, he said it was a beautiful summer's day in Scotland! We asked for directions and he went inside his cabin to grab a map of the area. He didn't have to do that, but he did. And we could tell how pleased he was. He clearly had a sense of purpose in his job:

I'm 65. I used to work in a call center. It wasn't a job – it was a nightmare. I hated it. It's been seven years that I look after this carpark, and I love it! I meet new people every day and I love helping them. I love being close to nature! Look at this incredible view! What else can I ask from life?

Edinburgh, Scotland



Common Interests

We met Benno and Jeanne in a coffee shop in Barcelona. They were sitting next to us and attracted our attention because they were wearing similar glasses. Plus, they seemed so genuinely happy together. They told us that they had three children and six grandchildren, and that they were planning a big party to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They shared a bit of their "secret recipe" for a happy marriage with us:

Respect each other. This is very important. And freedom. Don't make it a prison. Have some common interests, too. When you're together, live your life together.

We see a lot of young people who have a lot of friends and busy jobs. When do they have time for each other? What do they have together? And always exercise. We're very lucky to be healthy. We walk and bike a lot.

Barcelona - Spain



Sunshine Coast,
Australia



The Dancing Guy

We were at a Street Market the other day and we stopped to watch an amazing musician. The atmosphere was great, the crowd was happy, and we were all having fun. When the performer started playing his last song, a man came out of the blue and started to dance. It was so unexpected and yet so special. He was enjoying himself so much that I'm sure a lot of people were tempted to dance along with him. Once the show was over, we talked about his passion for life:

I'm John Harris, and I'm about 70. I like to dance to keep the body moving and keep it flexible so that I can live for quite a few more years. If you stop, you seize up and the blood stops flowing.

We are what we eat, and drink and think. If you think you can't do something, you probably can't. And vice versa.

I think being out and about and talking to people keeps you happy. We've got to pass a bit of happiness on, you know?

It's been a phenomenal journey for me, all over the place. I've been to Vanuatu, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore—I've done a bit of dancing everywhere. Whenever I see someone playing on the streets, I instantly dance like that. I feel free when I dance! The spirit floats off! Goes with the flow, bangs with the breeze! It's fantabulous!



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The Soul Explorers

Claudia and Sergio Lordao

1. How long did the authors spend dreaming and planning before they quit their jobs to start The Soul Explorers—a photographic storytelling project showcasing people from all walks of life?

2. What motivated them to leave their home and jobs after becoming empty nesters?

3. Whom do they interview during their travels?

4. Regardless of their age, culture, language, gender or beliefs, everyone they interview wants the same things: to be happy, to have a purpose in life and to be surrounded by loved ones. What does this look like in your life today?

5. Is there an adventurous idea that you would love to act on but haven't yet?

6. What are you willing to sacrifice to experience something new through travel? Comfort? Familiarity?