

Chronologically Gifted
Radio, Web Feature Conversations on Life After 50
By Carol Harrison

Ann Diver-Stamnes falls in love. Weekly.

"I fall in love with every guest that walks in the studio," the recently retired 58-year-old said. "I love hearing people's stories."

Through the end of May, 17 people have told their stories to Diver-Stamnes and fellow retiree Pam Brown, volunteer co-hosts of KHSU's "Chronologically Gifted: Conversations on Life After 50."

The eight-minute show airs at 90.5 on the FM dial at 1:20 p.m. Thursday near the end of homepage. Interviews are available online at www.anniediver.wix.com/lifeafter50 and community discussion through a Facebook group, "Chronologically Gifted."

The two RSVP volunteers book weekly guests around a theme that shifts monthly.

In February, Rosella Pace was one of three guests to tackle love. She shared the wisdom accumulated through 95 years of life and 73 years of marriage.

"Keep the faith, follow the things you feel strongly about," and keep the feeling despite an "awful lot of things you can't help that stop you," the native Minnesotan said. The longer Pace lived, the more she came to realize that whenever she and her husband were having an "extreme experience" she didn't want to be with anyone else.

Fifty-four-year-old Jenny Hanson wowed her hosts in March with her adventure story about a cross country journey. The newly divorced and retired psychotherapist had never traveled on her own before venturing west in a van trip that lasted four years.

"It's a gift I recommend to anyone. Call it a mid-life crisis. Have one," Hanson said. "The things I choose to do now are the things I would not have been able to choose before that."

Neil Tarpey, the former sportswriter from the Times-Standard, retired 52 years after delivering newspapers from the seat of his bike. Cathleen Rafferty, a long-time middle school teacher, is five years into her retirement from Humboldt State University. Both interviews aired in May and covered identity after retirement.

"Work interferes with your life," Tarpey said four months after releasing 20 balloons on the winter solstice to mark his retirement.

He cherishes his new clock, a gift whose face is sliced in sevenths, one for every day of the week. He's scorned his razor, allowing the beard to stretch to six months by air date; shipped off six short stories, and created a life tree on the advice of a "fantastic" book he bought on a whim, "How to Retire Happy Wild and Free" by Ernie Zelinski.

“I did it at home: all the things you want to do more of, the places you want to travel,” he said. “Some are already happening. Some might not happen for years. I have a starting point.”

Rafferty splits time between Montana and Arizona and is learning how to “shift from being a human doing to a human being.” She’s “coming to like retirement more and more” as the constancy of “doing things” is replaced with the luxury of filling the same number of hours in a manner of her choice.

Rafferty thinks the look of uncertainty that graced her face in a kindergarten enrollment photo in 1958 matched the one she wore into retirement 55 years later, but she’s equally certain that it will work out for her now as it did then. The key is to heed her grandmother’s advice: “You are put on this earth to be useful, not useless.”

Being useful is what Volunteer Center of the Redwoods and RSVP program manager Maureen McGarry thought a radio show about older adults could be. Brown retired two years ago as a social work professor at HSU and had twice rejected volunteer possibilities McGarry sent her way before committing last fall to start the radio show in January.

“It’s really different from anything I’ve done, and it’s the first time I am doing something that concerns me personally,” Brown said. “The more Annie and I talked about it, the more excited I got.”

“The cool thing is to give voice to the people in our community and beyond to what it is like to be 50 or older,” said Diver-Stamnes. “There aren’t a lot of forums for this kind of deep, rich conversation and a lot of laughter.”

Future themes include: sports and senior athletics, loss, returning to passions of our youth, and changing relationships.

“We’re pretty good at pulling things out and listening,” Brown said.

Retirement has been a challenging transition for Brown. She said total immersion in her career and an inability to imagine how a life without those work relationships and demands might look kept her from pre-retirement planning. She admits to an emptiness that is “new and uncomfortable.”

“It’s helped me to hear people talking about what their time is like,” she said. “Retirement is uncharted territory. It’s good to hear that other people struggled, could rest with it and weren’t in a rush to figure it out. It does unfold, gradually.”

Diver-Stamnes expected to retire at age 70 and was “surprised” to realize she was ready at 57 to tackle a new phase of life starting last August. She has since earned her professional chocolatier certificate and squeezes in hand painting and airbrushing chocolates between backpacking, hiking, studying Italian and writing.

Two nonfiction and three fiction books are in the works and computer tech projects capture her interest. Diver-Stamnes learned how to edit online to produce the show and is the creator and manager of the show’s website and Facebook account.

“There’s a ton of life after 50, and it’s rich, meaningful and exciting,” Diver-Stamnes said. “I’m going to keep doing this until I’m not having fun, and I’m having a whole lot of fun right now.”

“It’s like being reborn,” Brown said. “Each week I learn something new about what that means.”

Another RSVP volunteer, Keri Raphael, works with the two as an engineer and co-editor of the pre-recordings. Raphael also produces her own radio show on KHSU, the "Conscious Contact Gospel Hour," from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m. on Sundays.

To volunteer, call RSVP at 442-3763. To suggest a theme or interview subject for the radio show, email pamandannie@gmail.com.

Area 1 Agency on Aging paid Carol Harrison to write this story.



Pam Brown (left) books a guest for KHSU radio show "Chronologically Gifted: Conversations on Life After 50. Engineer Keri Raphael (middle) and co-host Ann Diver-Stamnes look on. Photo by Carol Harrison



Pam Brown (left) and Ann Diver-Stamnes (right) volunteer through RSVP to co-host KHSU radio show "Chronologically Gifted: Conversations on Life After 50" Thursdays at about 1:20 p.m.. Engineer Keri Raphael (middle) looks on. Photo by Carol Harrison