

## **Conversations About Aging**

**Peesh, 76**

**April 22, 2019**

**Diane**

Tell me again what kind of tea this is.

**Peesh**

It's *Lapsang Suchong*, something like that. But it's smoky tea. I don't know anything about it except that I like it.

**Diane narration**

Today, I'm visiting Peesh, a retired nurse practitioner, at the home she shares with her husband Paul. I interviewed her once before for a Catching Health blog post about a program offered by the Bath Housing Authority. Because she and Paul own their own home and their income is below a certain level, they qualified to have some modifications done at no cost.

**Peesh**

So we can age in place or comfortably home, I think is the name of it now.

**Diane**

So what does that mean for you to age in place?

**Peesh**

Boy, it means something different to me versus my husband, but to me it does mean being around all my stuff, my yarn, my fabric, my paints, in my own kitchen as long as I can, you know, I just would not at, this point in my life, age 76, I'm not ready to go someplace that I consider possibly sterile and we can't afford to have a wonderful little place at Highland Green or something built to our specifications. So the next best thing for me is just being here in a house that we're comfortable with, even, despite the furnace and all that.

**Diane**

Well, this is an old house.

**Diane**

So it's a little bit of a rabbit warren house. It has small rooms. It has a steep staircase. Not exactly the ideal for people who are getting older.

**Peesh**

No, definitely not hard to get up and down the stairs for me. My husband thinks the reason we're doing relatively well is because of the stairs. So that's one of our arguments. And um, for me it's too closed in, you know.

## **Peesh**

We also have a little camp in Eastport. I think I told you that Paul bought a little piece of land and built a little cabin. It's like 20 feet by 16 feet and we have such gorgeous long views and that's what I need for myself.

## **Diane narration**

Eastport is where Peesh and Paul first met and then reconnected many years later. It's a small coastal town in Downeast Maine.

Peesh and her first husband moved there in the 60s from Connecticut. They saw an ad for affordable housing in Eastport and decided it would be a great place to raise their family.

They arrived with four children and then had another — five children in six years, something she doesn't regret, but ...

## **Peesh**

You know, I don't, I don't regret my children. I adore them and I feel lucky to have had that experience. But I would not have had five children. I would have no, I was 21 when my first child was born, but still, I think I would have, you know, delayed having children, thought more about what

this really means for me, for my life, for the future, for the child's life, you know?

### **Diane narration**

Peesh did not raise her children the way she was raised. It was important to her that they be independent thinkers, something that was not encouraged when she was a child.

She grew up in a little village outside of Stamford, Connecticut. Her father's family was Russian and her mother's Hungarian — that's where the name Peesh comes from.

### **Peesh**

Peesh is a Hungarian nickname. My real name is Patricia. My brother called me Peesha. It means little rascal or can I say it little pissar in Hungarian and um, you know, it just stuck because it feels like more of a peasant type name. And I always identified with my hard working, um, gardening, strong grandmothers, both on both sides, my Hungarian grandma and my Russian grandmother.

### **Peesh**

My Russian grandmother lived with us, most of our, well, we lived with her. My father was in France and Germany during World War II, so my mother and I lived with that

grandmother, my father's mother. And it was a very matriarchal society. I was very spoiled. I loved it. I loved my Nonna, my mother worked at a prism-making factory for the war effort and you know, I was just spoiled by people who would come in and out. They felt sorry for me because my father, I didn't even know my father, you know, he was six, I was six months old when he left. And by the time I knew him I was almost three, something like that. But anyway, I love it being spoiled and we had Henny, the iceman, we had all those old wonderful memories.

When my father got back from World War II, suddenly things changed and they got harder because, you know, he thought, you know, it's the man's job to discipline the child and you, young lady when you're 21, then you can make decisions and I was already making decisions, I realized, but I wish that I had been raised in an atmosphere of more, more openness, it wasn't quite like my mother's time when children were more meant to be seen and not heard or maybe not even seen, you know. But, I could not differ from what my father thought politically, religiously. What's the other big thing like that? You know, the big things were not allowed to be discussed. Every time they were, I'd get into some sort of

trouble. Like I'd get grounded, I wouldn't be able to do something wonderful that I wanted to do.

**Diane**

For expressing your opinion?

**Peesh**

Yeah. Yup.

**Diane narration**

Even though she was discouraged from speaking her mind at home, Peesh's independent spirit was not quashed.

**Diane**

Did you live up to your nickname?

**Peesh**

Yes. Can you tell?

**Diane**

Yeah, you are pretty lively.

**Peesh**

Well, I enjoy, you know, being upbeat as much as I can be.

## **Diane narration**

There have been times in her life when being upbeat was likely a challenge. Peesh's youngest child, Emma, was born with a chromosomal abnormality. She died four and a half years ago, at the age of 44.

## **Peesh**

She was lovely. Um, I feel so lucky to have known her and so do a lot of other people. She was socially gifted and she lived in a nursing home for the last part of her life because she had not only some mental challenges, but she had rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes really, you know, uncontrollable diabetes, osteoporosis, just so many, many things for this poor soul. But she never complained and she welcomed every new person who came into the nursing home, Seaside in Portland, and I still visit people there. You know, we had a real connection. We spent Christmases and holidays there, you know, and it was special. It was special trying, you know, hoping to bring some sort of joy to other people who maybe wouldn't have had that experience.

## **Diane**

It sounds like she brought a lot of joy.

**Peesh**

She did. And that's, she dragged us all in and you know.

**Diane**

Into her joy?

**Peesh**

Into her joy, she really did. She really, really did.

**Diane narration**

While we were talking, Paul came home and joined our conversation. Peesh and Paul have been married 30 years. I asked them how they kept the love alive.

**Peesh**

Oooh, because Paul won't argue. I try to goad him into arguing a little bit, but he is such an even-tempered person. He has been through the worst menopause, you know? I mean, he was the, he's stuck with me through all kinds of, you know, menopause, Emma's death, um, you know.

**Paul**

Well, we're kind of each other as best friends and, and uh, we have, we have history, good memories of each other and uh, it's, yeah, it's, you know, we look back, I mean, I

look back, I don't see any reason not to be in love with her, you know, one of those things.

### **Diane narration**

And now they're in their 70s and trying to decide what to do next. Paul owns his own business making custom boat tops, mooring covers, and enclosures. He works out of their garage.

### **Diane**

You love doing that work? Why?

### **Paul**

Partly because I like the machines. I like the mechanics of it. I liked the aesthetics of it. I'm a boat person initially and I just have a feeling for boats and the aesthetics of boats and I also like material fabrics. Canvas. I've liked sewing machines for a long time, before I could sew.

### **Diane narration**

Peesh spends a lot of her time painting in her studio or taking art classes. Painting feeds her soul. So does Eastport. She wants to sell the house and spend the rest of their days in their little cottage in Eastport.

### **Diane**

So this notion of your wishing you could just get out of this house and move to Eastport and have what you need to be able to do your art, the art community. Why is that important to you?

### **Peesh**

I like community and I feel that I have a community and a base. We already have the land. We have a house that we could live in, in the summer while we were getting, I mean, it just seems that we could do it and also I would like to die there. You know, I don't, I'm not ready, but if I had to choose a place that would be it because you look out over the ocean and people are so connected.

### **Diane**

So you feel a deep connection?

### **Peesh**

I feel a very deep connection to that community.

### **Diane narration**

Paul would prefer to stay put. The garage is all set up for his canvas work and it would be hard to establish a new space somewhere else. Then there's the challenge of finding new customers. Physical limitations have also become challenging.

## **Paul**

My problem is I'm feeling like physically limited in being able to make big moves. Like my legs aren't very good. I have bad legs and I'm set up now. It's hard to, you know, finding a place where the room's big enough to make a shop in. Put a big enough table down to take on jobs that, that someone can walk in off the street and say, can you repair this?

## **Diane**

Is it hard getting older? Oh yeah. Physically, um, unless you can get distracted by focusing on something, some project. I mean, that's the best time. It's been hard. I just had my shoulder operated on a week and a half ago, so I had to take it real easy.

## **Diane narration**

For the time being, they'll keep doing the things they love, but moving to Eastport may remain a bit of a compromise. They go from May to September. At least Peesh does. Paul goes back and forth. As for the future, they'll let things unfold.

Before I said goodbye, I asked if they had any advice to share.

## **Paul**

Get together as many memories as you can and live while you can still do it. You know, I went sailing in my thirties, lived on a boat for a few years down the islands and ran into people who were our age now who all said to me, wow, if only we had done this when we were your age. Here we are, we're retired. I've got high blood sugar, you know, heart problems, you know, and I didn't realize how nice it was not to have physical problems, but when you don't have the physical problems, do what you can with your body, you know, use it anyway. I have good memories and this is part of it.

## **Peesh**

Uh, I think live fully and find your own what makes you tick while you're being kind to everybody else, too. You know, not, I don't mean be selfish your whole life, but you know, really, really focus on what it is that nurtures you and how you can nurture the world, too.

## **Diane narration**

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