

# catching DIANE ATWOOD health

## **Conversations About Aging**

**Bill Saltzer, 93**

**August 26, 2019**

**Diane:** Welcome to Conversations About Aging. I'm Diane Atwood and I'm traveling throughout the state of Maine, talking to people who are 60 and older about their perspectives on aging. And right now I am sitting with Bill Saltzer who is, you've just told me. Tell me again, how old are you?

**Bill:** 93 years old. 93.

**Diane:** Can you believe it?

**Bill:** Oh well, uh, guess I have to. Yeah, there it is.

**Bill:** I'll be 94 in November, but

**Bill:** I came into assisted living here in Gorham back in December this, well, December last year when I had to move. I moved out of, I lived in Dayton for about 25 years,

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so that's not that far away. But I was, the wife died, so I've been by myself, which meant that I gotta do cooking and the shopping and all of that, everything. And it got to the point where after a couple of more heavy snowstorms, I fell down on the porch there and hurt my back. And I said, well, that's it. My kids had been after me to get out of there, you know, and get in the assisted living place. So my daughter, Patty who lives in New Hampshire, we get together frequently and we went around and I found this place and I was happy with the situation here because it's a smaller place like 39 or whatever, people, residents, and not doing a lot of construction and they're not adding to the place, not building it out like so many other places. I see. So, and it's nice and quiet you're off in the woods. Nobody even knows that you're here. So this is why I'm here. Primarily.

**Diane:** So I couldn't help but notice that you do not have a Maine accent. You've got a New Jersey accent.

**Bill:** Oh yes. Well I've been here, well, I've been in Maine, well after I got out of the service, [as I said,] I went to

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Boston University and I've been in new England ever, ever since. Working for Raytheon Company and procurement and contracting work, it looks like. Well, I got my law degree and I was admitted to the bar in Massachusetts. And so I, I didn't work for the law department at Raytheon, but he did procurement business and a lot of lot of negotiation with, you know, some of your bigger companies for some of the big, uh, like the Patriot missiles and, and big programs like that. I spent a lot of time in, well, in Rhode Island. I was very happy down there with the submarines signal division and where we did a lot of submarine work and uh, that was interesting.

**Bill:** I've worked in Massachusetts and I've worked in Rhode Island and I've worked in Maine.

**Diane:** And you liked Maine the best? You chose to retire in Maine?

**Bill:** Yes, I did. Because as I said, well I was living in Maine for good many years since, uh, well 1990 when I retired, the wife, we had retired too, so we were both living

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there yet. I had my double wide home in Dayton and, and she passed away. In oh seven I think it was cause she got pretty sick and the, so then I was all by myself. So, and yeah, they say the kids were up to me to get through something, get out of there and yeah, because they were concerned about my health and about falling or getting hurt, which is what happened with the snow storm. So I hurt my back and so here I am.

**Diane:** Here you are. Well, I want to talk about the here and now, but first I want to go back to the beginning a little bit. Yeah. So you were born and raised in New Jersey? In Orange County, I think you told me.

**Bill:** Yeah. Well, Orange Memorial Hospital. I don't know what, I forget what county it may be. Essex county, it's Essex County, yeah. And it was the same hospital my grandfather died in 12 years earlier.

**Bill:** When he came into New Jersey, my grandfather, he got a job at the hat factory in Orange, I believe. It was a big hat, as a matter of fact, the name of the place was No

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Name, No Name Hat Company. And it turned out they were related to the Stetson's who later on moved down of course in the Philadelphia area. But uh, he was killed in an automobile accident. Well, a trolley car came and hit him and that's why he ended up in Orange Hospital.

**Bill:** And the doctor just, eh, apparent heart attack was his medical decision

**Diane:** as opposed to God struck by a trolley car.

**Bill:** He'd never gotten into it. He didn't want to get involved, I'm sure insurance reason, whatever reasons. And he just wrote down their apparent heart attack and that's the way he wrote the medical sign off on, on the death certificate.

**Diane:** But that had ramifications for your grandmother because tif here had been insurance.

**Bill:** Yeah. As it turns out, he was a member of the union, so there was some money from the union. And I think this

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is basically how she got out of Newark and move into Irvington, which is what I consider my hometown, Irvington, New Jersey. And so live, as I say, a number of years there until the, uh, well I went, went into the service from Irvington.

**Diane:** Ok, so you grew up in Irvington, New Jersey.

**Bill:** Correct.

**Diane:** And when you graduated from high school, you went right into the marines?

**Bill:** Correct.

**Diane:** What year was that and what did you do?

**Bill:** 43, well 1943 when I graduated from high school. And then, uh, I tried to get it in earlier but I wasn't 18 yet. And so I had to wait until I was 18. I turned 18 in November. So in November I joined the Marines, well,

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December I joined the Marine Corps and I was in boot camp in December 43.

**Diane:** Why did you want to join the marines?

**Bill:** I have an uncle who was in the marines in World War One and I knew about that and we used to talk about that, course, I remember he had a great big picture of himself in typical, he had served in France during World War One.

**Bill:** it just had to be the marine corps. And I've, I think kind of lucky in the sense that because I wasn't a great big John Wayne type, I did get in. I ended up with the marines in 43 and in Parris Island boot camp.

**Bill:** And then we went to New River and then ended up going to California. And then I was in three combat missions in SaiPan, Tinian and Okinawa. And after, the Saipan became the second division headquarters. This is the division I was in. And at the end of the, well we were getting ready to invade Japan when they dropped the atomic bombs and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Well then, of

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course, the war ended. They had the big ceremony on the Missouri where they all surrendered and all that business. About a month later we went to Japan. The second division, we landed in Nagasaki, I was in Nagasaki about a month after the A-bomb was dropped. So I spent about a couple of months in Nagasaki and then when MacArthur took over Japan, became quote, “the emperor himself” and we were all moved down to the down to Kanoya, which was the far south end of the island of Kyushu.

**Bill:** I ended up being taken. There was about 18 or 20 of us, I guess they took people, one I was a high school graduate and apparently I got some pretty good record marks on some of these tests I took.

**Bill:** Anyway, they came down and he got ahold of me and sent me to a Japanese language school in on Saipan to be interpreters. Nothing official and you didn't get promoted, you didn't get anything because I was a PFC and that's what I stayed forever.



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**Bill:** And then, then we went to Okinawa landing in Okinawa there in April, April 1st ,45. Yeah.

**Diane:** So by now, you're 20 years old by now, you're much older and wiser?

**Bill:** I don't know about wiser but older and course I turned 20 in Japan while I was on occupation duty in Japan.

**Bill:** So as I say, spent like six months in Japan, pretty much independent type because I was an interpreter and they put me with different groups, to support different people because what we, a big job, we had in on Kyushu was Japanese at turned in surrender documents listing all the weapons they had. And so we had to go out and check it and see. And a lot of places they had all kinds of ammunition. Out in like, uh, a Japanese high school yard.

**Bill:** And then we found a big cave right in Sasebo where they had all kinds of the bombs that they were, uh, uh, using, uh, from the con, the Kanoya air force was using these kinds of bombs for attacking the American ships off

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Okinawa. So had a cave full of those, and we had a group of us, a lieutenant and it's a small group, they send up there and say, what the heck, what are we going with these? They say, well, we're going to have to take them out of here somehow or other. Well, we didn't have the equipment, they didn't do well. We did it on it with a jeep, put the big bombs on a running board or on the front end of it and they'd haul them out and drop them in the ocean. So we did that quite a bit and realized that we hit a pretty big bunch and we'd be there forever. We found out that there was many more in there. They never listed these or on any of the surrender documents we had, so we were not sure and well, so, one of the things, they decided the way you're getting rid of them. pour a lot of airplane gasoline that we took from that, that Japanese had for their air force and we just poured it in there and lit it up and blow up whatever we could. That must've been quite spectacular. It certainly was the, the people, the little town right below because this was up on a hill where Kanoya had their landing fields and they had the cliff and then the small town of Sasebo? I'm trying to remember the name of the town. [inaudible] yes. Of course they, they made great

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shochu which was their rice, not rice, whiskey, sweet potato whiskey. And because they got to know me as [inaudible] and then he come around, they bring their big bottles of, of the uh, shochoo and they said it was a gift gift and they really wanted was the bottle back. And so did they, we had, it was interesting. It was in, in that little town for about two months found it very interesting, little things like that.

**Diane:** What kind of a welcome did you get when you came back from the service?

**Bill:** Don't forget now the war is over for six months. I come back, you would think there was no war. We'd had no big parade, no big Hullabaloo.

**Bill:** I remember landing [inaudible] getting discharged given 20 some bucks or whatever it was to get back to Jersey and to Penn station in New York. And I had, and I took the bus from there to get back home.

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**Bill:** I come back and my mother happened to be sick at that time for some reason. And of course she had been in her room. I got back there. My father was all excited to see me. We were never very close as a father son, because that's the way we were. I remember, I think it was the only, the biggest hug I ever got from my father when I got back from the service. Course that was a surprise because they know I was coming, but they weren't sure when. No, I just showed up. Hello? I'm home. Oh, how about that? Isn't that nice?

**Diane:** So you came back from the war? Yeah. You hung out for a couple of years. Yeah. You enjoyed life. Yeah. And then what made you decide to take your next step?

**Bill:** Well, I know I, I was a high school graduate, you know, big deal then. I said, oh, I gotta go to college somehow. Rather, I didn't know how I was going to do that. Uh, course in Irvington, not too far. Sacred Heart had a school in South Orange that I was looking at somehow or other I bumped into a fellow that I knew. He had gone to Boston University. He said, why don't you go up there? I

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said, yeah, why not? So I went up there and uh, fortunately, course I had to take a couple of entrance exams or whatever and I got in. Because you are pretty smart. You said that you got good grades in high school. Yeah. So all I'm guessing, well they were bringing in students like crazy because this was now 1949 now I guess. Yeah, yeah. 49 when I went, started college. So they were bringing in students like crazy. Boston University wasn't, was not Harvard, not Yale. And it was, they were struggling so they were bringing. course I started school in a building that used to be the Harvard Medical School, cause I remember sitting in there where of course they have the sink and they'd have a big where the, you look at pictures, old pictures and the guy sitting in these racks going up to this to watch operations on the tables.

**Diane:** Oh, yeah.

**Bill:** Yeah. I was like, it was a strange place and we were pretty well packed in. We just went to school and had big, all kinds of people and that was to ... It was a general

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college. I finished there and then that was, luckily I signed up to go to law school, which I was able to transfer right on over, staying in BU at the law school right from the college, the general college, I think they called it at the time. So course, for two years then I went into law school over the three years. So I got my degree two degrees, you know, when I finished law school.

**Diane:** What was your degree or what was your major before law school?

**Bill:** Oh, we didn't really have majors because it was, I look back at it and I think it was pretty good. Some of the courses were good. Uh, some of them, I don't know, but um, I got all like his, I came out with an associates degree, AA degree, when I got out of that two year course, went into law school, course then after I graduated law school of course had a bachelor's. Yeah. Well eventually, ended up as doctor of laws as, as the final degree.

**Diane:** Your family must have been really proud of you.

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**Bill:** Oh yeah. They were. I remember, well again, my mother and my uncle and came up to the graduation, my father , no. Anyway, they came up into graduation and that was very nice. The cap and gown and the whole business. And uh, but so it's always my father and I, you know, we were just two different types and we were not close. No, whatever reason. Well, I was close, very close with my mother but ...

**Diane:** So that, here you are at your age, it still bothers you, I think, about your dad.

**Bill:** Well yeah.

**Diane:** You're a different personality than your dad. Yeah, very much so. But did you also, when you had your own kids, were you conscious of, I don't want to be like my dad was with me, with my kids?

**Bill:** Yes, right. Because I have four children and yeah, we, we're all very close.

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**Diane:** All of your four children are from your first marriage?

**Bill:** Correct.

**Bill:** We had Maureen, William, Patricia, Thomas.

**Diane:** And you have a great relationship with all four of those kids. That's wonderful.

**Bill:** Oh yeah.

**Diane:** Bill has a great relationship with all of his children, but he doesn't get to see them as much as he used to and that makes him sad, which we *do* talk about. As he mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, up until the end of 2018, Bill lived alone in the house he shared with his second wife, Lorraine, who passed away in 2007. He managed to take care of things — that includes himself, the house, and the outside, but as the years passed, it became more difficult, especially in winter.



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**Diane:** So at what age do you think you recognized that wow, this is a lot of work?

**Bill:** Well I was finding it a, I knew better but I was fighting it.

**Bill:** They, the kids were after me, to get out of there and get into assisted living someplace cause they knew and well when was it? November? Yeah. Around Thanksgiving when I was shoveling again and I fell down, hurt my back. I had a hell of a time crawling, just crawling any way I could. We had quite a ramp to get up and get out of there. So I said, well that's it. Now I've got to make the move whether I want to or not.

**Diane:** So for a couple of years I'm guessing they were kind of nagging at you?

**Bill:** They were after me to do something about it because they could see, well I was healthy enough and doing fine, no problem. But it's obvious, you know, you're not getting any younger, that's for sure. And as I say, more and more

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shoveling, aah, summertime's no problem. Then when the snow started flying and I had to worry about snow on the roof, had to hire people to get the snow off the roof and worry about the roof not collapsing and all of that.

**Diane:** So you ended up, you did hire people because I know that there were some communities where they have organizations that go out and help people because there are so many older people, they want to be able to stay in their own homes until the bitter end.

**Bill:** I was, well it costs me money, but I was luckily the guy across the way did work like that. So and then we were pretty friendly, eh. And so I used to be able to get ahold of him and he'd come up there so it would cost me, yeah, remember 600 bucks or something like that because he'd bring in two or three guys and they shovel it all off, which was fine. Took the weight off the roof, which is the thing I was concerned about. Of course it still builds up so bad and you have a trouble getting the oil guy to bring in the oil. But anyway, shovel that.

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**Diane:** It's always something isn't it?

**Diane:** So it was key for you to be able to stay in the house as long as you did to have other people that you could either hire or who were willing to come over and pitch in and help you.

**Bill:** Correct, correct. That made the big difference. Yes.

**Diane:** Because I know that there are a lot of communities, as I said, that they're really taking a look at the resources that are available to, to allow people to stay in their own homes.

**Bill:** Yeah. I've read about that. I haven't actually seen it, but I know it exists in places.

**Diane:** You drove up until the day you slipped and hurt your back?

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**Bill:** Well, yeah, I drove until I had to give up my car cause when I'm going to assisted living, I'm saying now we got a problem. Where are you going to park?

**Bill:** Well I ended up, I had a friend, he was anxious to get the car. So he bought the car. That's the way I got rid of the car.

**Diane:** That was hard for you though. Pretty independent?

**Bill:** Yes, very much so.

**Diane:** Your eyesight is still good. Oh yes. Eyesight's good. Hearing's good. You're not wearing a hearing aid. Are you?

**Bill:** No.

**Diane:** How did you luck out? You have really good genes, don't you?

**Bill:** I think so. Yeah.

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**Diane:** Did you have any bad habits?

**Bill:** Nope. None. None that I know of. None. I talk about it anyway.

**Bill:** No, I never smoked and that's from the very beginning as a kid, I can remember one time trying, I said, I this don't work. I was going to go play football with a local club and I said that's it. And I stopped. I did very little smoking. As a matter of fact, yeah, when my daughter Maureen one time came in and caught me, I had some, I'll never forget, had some Newport cigarettes. She got up, she cut them all up. She was going to, she was going to stop me from smoking.

**Diane:** Was she a kid then?

**Bill:** Yes, she was a kid then.

**Diane:** How about drinking?

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**Bill:** No, never had a problem with it, one way or another.

**Diane:** So here you are. Here you are. What's it like for you here? Are you content? Are you happy?

**Bill:** Well, things are fine. It's somewhat lonely at times.

**Diane:** That surprises me. You are lonelier here than you used to be living alone.

**Bill:** Yes.

**Diane:** Why?

**Bill:** Well, you can look around and you see, well there's people with cars come in, cars go out, people come and visit other people. It's just, and I can't see my kids. I see Patty every couple of months and that was, I don't see the others. Once. I think my son Bill visited me, but that was one time. So it's just that time drags when you're sitting here saying, oh, what am I going to do today? Well, I go

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down sit on the porch or I can go in the rocker or I can take a little walk outside. But you're locked in pretty much.

**Diane:** Are you going to go on the picnic that they're planning today?

**Bill:** Go? Oh yeah.

**Diane:** What would help you, like what could happen here that might make you feel less disconnected?

**Bill:** Oh no, it's fine. Ah, really, I mean I, I'd just as soon not have people just pop in and say, hi, we're here. Happy New Year or Merry Christmas or whatever and no, I'm perfectly content to sit there and like we've got plenty of books to read and I can do a lot of reading and just sit here and listen to television or whatever.

**Diane:** Would you like to be able to just go out, do whatever you felt like doing?

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**Bill:** Well, that would be nice, but I realize that that's not too possible without having the wheels to do it.

**Diane:** What if there was somebody that maybe on a regular basis came in and said, hey Bill, you want to go to the bowling alley with me or something like that.

**Bill:** Talking about Julie here, she does a lot of work setting up trips just like now, this 11 o'clock picnic thing. We go to Hannaford's like twice a month. We'll go to the Dollar Store maybe once a month or so. The van is available most of the time you just go down and get on it. For instance, we went out to Wolfborough, New Hampshire here a couple of weeks ago to the World War II museum out there in Wolfborough. Wonderful trip. I had been there once before because I was pushing to go there and we went there and we had a great time. Everybody was very impressed and they want to get back there again. They're talking about doing it again next year.

**Diane:** So you're not unhappy, just,



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**Bill:** no. Yeah. Well sometimes I say, geez, what am I going to do today or what's going to happen tomorrow or later today or something like that. So. You have no control over what may or may not happen. You, you're you, you're just with the tide, going in and out.

**Diane:** So you lose a little bit of control over things.

**Bill:** Oh, you do lose a lot of control is primarily not having wheels, not having to like go down and hop in a car and go shopping or go to a movie or whatever. No.

**Diane:** And there's really nothing that can prepare you for that.

**Bill:** No, there isn't.

**Diane:** It's like one day you're fine and the next day it changes.

**Bill:** Well, it can be a shock. And for instance, you have limited space for your clothes while you don't need a lot of

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clothes, which is fine, but you discover that over time, After you move in, you say, what have I got this for? I don't need a heavy coat, you know, if it's that cold, I'm going to stay in here because they keep this, please go hit the well lit and well warm and they maintain the place fine.

**Diane:** What makes it a good day for you?

**Bill:** Well, quite often like, well, when was it? Yesterday, they had a violin.

**Diane:** You got any advice about being able to manage being older?

**Bill:** Well, just live with it the best you can.

**Diane:** Do you want to live to be much older?

**Bill:** Well, I thought about it. I said, well, I don't know. If I can remain healthy and all of that and uh, yeah, man. Yeah. Why not?

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**Diane:** Is there anything that you wish I had asked you that I didn't, that you think is important?

**Bill:** I think you've pretty well covered anyway, but back to high school and, and yeah, Jersey and all of that. Yeah. I think we covered it pretty well.

**Diane:** I've enjoyed this a great deal.

**Bill:** Yeah, so have I.

**Diane:** You've been listening to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health special series. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Bill Saltzer, who's 93 years old. If you have anything to say about our conversation or any other of my other Conversations About Aging — please let me know. Something resonated with you, constructive criticism, you want to recommend someone to be interviewed, or you'd like to be a podcast sponsor — whatever. I want this podcast to make a difference in people's lives.

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