

Catching Health with Diane Atwood
Conversations About Aging
Ernie DeRaps, 91
October 7, 2109

Welcome to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and I'm traveling around the state of Maine interviewing people 60 and older about their perspectives on aging. A few months ago, I got a call from Patti Eger. Her dad, who's 91 had heard about my podcast and was interested in being interviewed. Not long after, we sat together in his living room at his home in Richmond. Here and there were packing boxes, some of them filled with paintings he'd done, many of them of lighthouses — a hobby he picked up in his 80s. He was going to be moving into a senior community in Brunswick in the next few weeks. Just another adventure he told me. He's had quite a few, including being a lighthouse keeper. He and his late wife Pauline co-authored a book about their experiences. His half of the book was Lighthouse keeping and hers was Light Housekeeping. That's just one of the interesting things we talked about in this episode of Conversations About Aging. My guest's name is Ernie --- I'll let him make a more formal introduction.

Ernie DeRaps: Well, my name is Ernest Gregory DeRaps. Gregory for the old bishop. Uh, many years ago. The pope, I mean Pope Gregory and I'm the youngest and last of 14 children and my mother was born in Beauceville, Quebec, Canada and my father in the Magdalen islands out in the Gulf of St Lawrence. Uh, I lived on a little farm when I was a youngster and the two older siblings, one was four years and one was six years older than I, so I became almost an only child because my two older two next older siblings were girls and during the depression years, they went to work while they were just youngsters. So that left me alone with my mother and father on a little farm, two acres. And uh, we lived in a four-room house. Can you imagine an upstairs bedroom with a window but no glass covered with an old thing from a green bag? And the front room was where my mother and I, my mother and father slept and where I slept until I was about 10 in a crib because the other beds in the other room were taken up by the other siblings.

Diane: So even though it was like you were raised as an only child, they came home to sleep at night. Yeah. It must've been like a dormitory.

Ernie DeRaps: Not really. It was just two rooms upstairs. It was a four-room house, all told. But, uh, there were two beds in there and that's boys in one room, the girls in another, I mean in the beds. But uh, I had a good life. I can't complain.

Diane: And you're still having a good life?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I'm only 91 and a half, but the good Lord doesn't want me yet. I keep telling him I'm ready, but he's not.

Diane: That's interesting because I talked to a lady, uh, recently and she's 95. She had a very, she had inoperable lung cancer when she was 60. Wow. She was given three months to live and she's 95. So she said it a little slightly. different. She said somebody somewhere wants me to stay. But she also said maybe it was her who kept her around because there was still things she wanted to do and things she wanted to see.

Ernie DeRaps: Well as you can see, when I turned 80, I started painting. I've always drawn, but by doing paintings that keeps me occupied. And I visit places occasionally. There's a place in town known as the Golden Oldies. They have cribbage every Monday and I try to get to that and I stay active. I go out on the street out here with my orange jacket so people won't run over me. But I walk about every day, try to get in close to a mile.

Diane: And you're going to be moving soon to a totally different location?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, it's going to be much different because I'll be amongst other seniors and the rooms will be open and if they want stuff, I'm bringing my art stuff with me. I can do some art for them. So ...

Diane: Or you might start up like a portrait studio or something and have them lined up to have their portraits done.

Ernie DeRaps: Anything but portraits.

Diane: Okay.

Ernie DeRaps: You can't please people.

Diane: They might not like what it is that you saw in them. Well, let's go back to your childhood. So you've explained to me where you grew up. Yep. When did you leave home and where did you go?

Ernie DeRaps: Uh, on my 18th birthday, my father signed the paper and I went into the Navy. While I was in high school as a junior, I was fortunate enough to get my flying license, so that allowed me to get into the Navy Air Branch. And I joined the navy air and they sent me to photography school. I was nine months in Pensacola, Florida, learning photography and I became an aerial photographer. So when I finally finished school, they put me out on the west coast and I was flying in big aircraft with cameras, flying up and down the coast looking for Japanese submarines and balloons, anything that Japanese tried to throw into the country. So, uh, I did that for a while, but eventually came back to Maine and my wife, I got married, a young lady that I had met through her uncle and we were married and she says, you know, Ernest, if you stay in the Navy they're going to put you on an island or on some big ship because you gotta fly cause you are an aerial photographer. So I said, well what should we do? She says I suggest you join the Coast Guard? I said, what's the Coast Guard? I hadn't really heard much about it and I was stationed down in Rockland at the time and so I joined the Coast Guard and we became lighthouse keepers after a short while. So that's another whole story.

Diane: Well, I'm going to get to that. I want to fill in some gaps here. Okay. So tell me your birth date.

Ernie DeRaps: I was born on January 22nd, 1928 in Palmyra, Maine.

Diane: So I was going to ask you about the Maine connection. When did the fam, when did your family move into Maine?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, my mother was born in Quebec while her parents are visiting their parents in Quebec and as soon as the storm let up, they came back to Maine and my mother grew up right in Fairfield, Maine. But when she went to get her Social Security, she had to become a citizen because she was born out of the country.

Diane: So even though she was born to Maine citizens, she still had to go through that.

Ernie DeRaps: Yes. She had to become a Maine citizen and uh, I lost her when I was only 17 cause I'm the youngest of 14 kids. How old was she? Oh, let's say she was born in 1886 and died in 95, 85. I have to stop and think.

Diane: It's hard to, that's okay. I just was wondering if longevity ran in your family.

Ernie DeRaps: I'm the youngest of 14. They're all gone. And the oldest one that I recall was my brother Wilfred who lived to be 96. All the others who are gone in their 50s or a couple in their forties. Well, I lost two brothers during the first world war of influenza. One was five and one was seven and then later on, just before I was born, one of my sisters passed away. She'd been in the hospital a long time and I guess now they'd call it cancer, but they let her come home and she was home only about three weeks and she passed away.

Diane: And she was still a child at the time?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I think she was 16,17.

Diane: You know, I wondered about that. To be the youngest of that many children and kind of like, not to be part of the unit. Like some of the kids would have been closer, but still, you've lost all your siblings now. Yeah. What does that feel like?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, it just makes me feel older I guess. But I've had a good life and I still have my family and I'm happy.

Diane: That's good.

Ernie DeRaps: I am moving into a senior home, which will be a new adventure.

Diane: That is a wonderful way to look at it. Yeah. So when you told me, so you left home at 18 and you went into the Air Force part of the Navy or whatever you want to call, you went into the navy. Um, when you told me that you got married, a little smile crept up on your face. So I want you to tell me about meeting Pauline.

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I was working at Dakin's Sporting Goods in Bangor, Maine and I was in the photographic department. I used to go and show films and all of that. And across the hall in another part of the building was the guns and fishing equipment and all that stuff. And there was a gentleman there and uh, he decided that once my sister left, my sister and I were living together. We had, uh, each had a bedroom with kitchen facilities that we could use. But then one day, a fellow came and took my sister away. They went off and got married and he had worked for a dentist and it was the dentist's son that came and they went off and got married. So that left me all alone. And the gentleman, Mr. John Fitzgerald was in the fishing and gunning department and he says, I know you're all alone now. I'd like to have you come out to dinner. Oh, sure, free meal. So I went out and I was introduced to Pauline, Eva Fitzgerald. And I said, Huh. And I

was there, we finished dinner and the phone rang and Pauline answered the phone and she turned and looked at me and she said, I got an old friend that would like to come see me. He's in the military and he's headed away from here. I said, no, nothing to me. I just met you. Sure. So about 20 minutes later I walked a six-foot-six Marine in full dress uniform. And I say, wow, so that was your friend? Yup. So he took off and we never heard from him again. Don't know what happened, never, never heard. So anyway, I started dating Pauline.

Ernie DeRaps: And one night we were sitting in front of the hotel there in Belfast, Maine and I said, neither one of us were drinkers and we didn't dance that often. And I said, I really don't feel like dancing tonight, you know, I said, let's go see the doc, a doctor because you had to have a blood test back then.

Diane: That's pretty romantic, huh?

Ernie DeRaps: Yeah, that's romantic I asked her if she wanted to go have a blood test. She agreed. So we went and the doctor was closed so we had to wait and go the next day. But we got a blood test and within I think two weeks, I think we were married, married in a Catholic Church there in Belfast and uh, I had a whole new life.

Diane: And it was good.

Ernie DeRaps: Well, we had 64 years together. Aren't many people can say that, but,

Ernie DeRaps: She was pretty sick for quite some time and it just so happened my son was visiting and keeping an eye on her when she passed away. Yeah. I wasn't there at the time, probably just as well. But anyway, uh, we had six children and I think I can almost say seven because we had a little Chihuahua puppy and we happen to pick that dog up on my mother's birthday who had died many years ago, so we called the dog Mary Little Git after my mother. And, uh, that was our seventh child.

Diane: After the others have left the house?

Ernie DeRaps: Pretty much, yeah. So anyway, that's, that's the marriage part of it.

Diane: I still can't get over the fact that instead of saying, Pauline, will you marry me? You said want to go get a blood test?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, she understood what it was all about.

Diane: So you were on the same page?

Ernie DeRaps: Yeah, we were on the same page. And it wasn't too long after that we got married and because I was in the service, she suggested that I get out of the navy and join the coast guard because then I could be nearer home. And the Coast Guard sent me to Rockland, Maine, which is not only 20 miles from Belfast where we'd been living. And the first part I was able to get home every other night, every other weekend on leave. And uh, that developed into another thing, a gentleman on one of the men's stags, men only station, the lighthouse, uh, was having problems with his wife who was messing around. So I went out and stayed at his lighthouse for two nights so that he could come in and check things out. And evidently I did a reasonably good job taking care of the lighthouse. Although the first night I put the wick up too high trying to get more light out for the mariners. And I went out to check it around nine o'clock at night and the thing was just full of soot cause I'd put the wick up too high and I had to clean up a big mess that next day. But anyway, I learned a lesson as a kid. We only had lamps anyway, lived on a farm and we had no electricity, no running water, all that.

Diane: So you were used to lighting the lamp. So when you went into the Coast Guard, it probably never occurred to you that you would be living on a lighthouse at some point.

Ernie DeRaps: I don't even know what a lighthouse was at that time actually, but it didn't take long to learn. And the fellow that I relieved for a couple of nights, I guess I did a fairly good job because next thing I knew, the commanding officer who was a chief petty officer, said, how would you like to live at a lighthouse? And I said, I don't know, where are you talking about? He says, well, Monhegan. I said, where in Heaven's name is Monhegan Island? Oh, he says 10 miles off the coast and he says, I know that your wife has a child and that your, she's pregnant with a second one. But, uh, I think that, uh, the Coast Guard would take care of things if it's needed. So I said, well, I'll have to go check with the Mrs. So I told her they wanted me to go to a lighthouse and she asked where and I told her, she says 10 miles off the coast. I said, yeah, well she says, I guess we could try it. So we went to Monhegan island and uh, that was the hardest lighthouse to maintain because it was an oil fired light, kerosene. And it was known as an incandescent oil vapor light. And there were two tanks on a floor below the lens itself. One was an air pressure tank, one was an oil tank. You fill the oil tank and you pump up the pressure in the air pressure tank and it forced the oil up into the lens up above the next flight up. And, uh, I had to use a Bunsen tube to preheat the gas into a tube over a mantle. And once I preheated it, then the gas, not a, but a vapor gas would

go into an Aladdin mantle similar to an Aladdin lamp. It was a son of a gun sometimes to keep going, but I learned to take care of it.

Diane: How long were you there?

Ernie DeRaps: I think if I, it's in the book that I've published, but I think it was something like seven months that we were there and I learned to maintain it and it had to be on a half hour before sunset and stayed on a half hour after sunrise. And it was a, a guiding light for all mariners.

Diane: Are you saying that you had to light it twice a day or it stayed on all that time?

Ernie DeRaps: It stayed on at night. I'd light it at night and it'd stay on until morning when I'd turn it off. But it was oftentimes the very first thing that people coming from Europe could see because they come around the north end of the Atlantic Ocean. And that was one of the guiding posts when they came from England or Ireland or anywhere in Europe. So it was interesting. But, uh, after I think about seven months, it's in the book that we put together. And by the way, the book is two-sided, my wife's a better story. And the other side is my side.

Diane: It's a very clever title for each of them. You are lighthouse keeping and her story is light housekeeping.

Ernie DeRaps: Yes. And there was a lady who had published several books that I knew that, suggested that. Yeah. Katie Smith.

Diane: I have a question about lighthouse again. So you took care of it for two nights or two days at the lighthouse in Rockland?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, no, it was outside of Rockland. It was over towards, east of Rockland, east of Vinalhaven. Mark Island was the name of it. Mark Island.

Diane: So you took care of a lighthouse over on Mark Island to help a fellow out for two days? Yeah. They saw that you had, or the Coast Guard saw that you had an aptitude, did you see it when you were out there taking care of that lighthouse for those two days? Was there anything stirred in you?

Ernie DeRaps: I knew nothing really about lighthouses at that time. I had seen the one at Rockland entrance to the harbor. Um, yeah, out on the island. It's a long walkway on rocks.

Diane: Is it by the Samoset?

Ernie DeRaps: Yeah, from the Samoset you go, went out into the entrance to Rockland Harbor.

Diane: So I've walked that walk before. I think I know where you mean. So you had seen that, but you didn't have any longing to live on a lighthouse?

Ernie DeRaps: No, I had nothing because, well, I was married and we had two children. I, we had one child and my wife was pregnant with number two. And so I went home and asked her if she'd like to be on a lighthouse and she said where? And I told her and she says, well, I guess there's no doctors out there except maybe in the summer, for summer people. So I guess we could do it because the coast guard would take care of me.

Diane: And so what happened when your second child was born? Did they have to come and cart her away in a boat?

Ernie DeRaps: Yeah, they came to Monhegan and she went to visit her folks in Belfast. She was there, I believe, only three days and went to the hospital and had our second child right there in Belfast.

Diane: And came back to the lighthouse. Yeah. What did you learn from living on that Lighthouse for seven months? Besides the fact that it was a heck of a lamp to light?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, the thing is mariners needed direction back then. Modern technology, you don't even need a lighthouse now, but back then they could go from one lighthouse to another because there was 65 of them along the Maine coast, which I have painted every one. But anyway, uh, back then when were using lighthouses, the mariners could go from one to another so that they'd know exactly where they are because each one had a different significance. One might be blinking every 20 seconds, another one might be blinking every 10 seconds. Or it had different characteristics at each lighthouse so that you'd know exactly where you were at if you were on a ship.

Diane: What made the Monhegan lighthouse different?

Ernie DeRaps: It was 10 miles off the coast and it was one of the first lighthouses that people would see coming from Europe. And I understand that also sometimes in clear weather they could see, uh, our lightest, our highest mountain in Maine, Mount Katahdin.

Ernie DeRaps: It's on the highest point in Monhegan and uh, you can get down, well the last 50 feet of the road coming up is so steep, that you have to have a four-wheel drive to get up there.

Diane: I wish your wife was still alive so I could ask her some questions too. How do you think she liked living there?

Ernie DeRaps: She never went downtown or the town, what little town it was, but uh, we were together and that's what she wanted, so.

Diane: And how did you like it?

Ernie DeRaps: Oh, it was a challenge. Lighting that light every night and keeping it lit. And uh, there were three phones on the island, one at the lighthouse, one at the general store, and one down at the post office. One night I got a phone call and the post office was closed and they were trying to reach the store where the other phone was and something happened. They couldn't reach them. So they asked me to take a message down to the store. So I wrote the message down and I said, yeah, I'd be happy to take it. I'm uh, working for the military. I'm obliged to do what I can to help all of humanity. Uh, I wrote the message down and I decided rather than go down on the roadway, I'd take a shortcut down through the cemetery that was just below the lighthouse. Well, that was quite an adventure because I got about halfway through the lighthouse, uh, through the cemetery. And what do you suppose happened? I almost stepped on a partridge and a partridge flew up between my feet and I almost went up with it. I said hello to the good Lord that night cause I really was jumped out of my flesh.

Diane: That's a funny story. Where did you get stationed after Monhegan?

Ernie DeRaps: After Monhegan, my wife was really happy because they put us at fort point in Stockton Springs, Maine, which is at the mouth of the river and the head of the bay, Penobscot Bay. And it was only about 15 miles from Belfast where we had been living and where my wife's folks lived. So she was very happy there.

Diane: So you went to Stockton Springs? Yup. And then they sent you someplace else?

Ernie DeRaps: They sent me to what they call a stag station. Men only. And it was on Green island south of Vinalhaven out in the middle of Penobscot Bay. It was anyone coming from Europe or whatnot. It was a point that they could see because they had to go around the two islands. Anyway, that took me away from my family. But I was fortunate enough as I was only a second class engineman then I would've had enough money to rent a small place on Vinalhaven so I could see the family when I went in to get mail or whatnot.

Diane: So were there other men on this island?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, it was three of us assigned there and one was usually on leave and that's when I did a lot of studying because to get a rate in the Coast Guard, you had to take tests and I had to study and take the test.

Diane: Well, so you're on the stag island, which you got some studying done. Yeah. And you got to see your family sometimes, but I hope that didn't last very long.

Ernie DeRaps: I don't remember just how many months. I was there quite some time. A couple of years, I think. Yup.

Diane: Oh my gosh. Was that the longest assignment?

Ernie DeRaps: Uh, no. I think the longest assignment was the last place that I was at.

Diane: Where did they send you after Green Island?

Ernie DeRaps: From Green Island, they sent me to Browns Head, which was on Vinalhaven proper and it was the entrance to the thoroughfare between North Haven and Vinalhaven. And I was only there for a short while, I think probably only a couple of months when we had what they call the annual lighthouse, uh, inspection. So people came from Boston headquarters to inspect the lighthouse and one of the gentleman, well, three people came one to talk with me, one would talk with my wife and the other owner would explore the place and one of the young men got to the foot of the stairs and was going to go upstairs and my wife said, I'm sorry, my children are sleeping upstairs, I'd prefer you not to go upstairs. Well, that kind of ticked off the fellow that I was talking with who was the head of the group, three men. And uh, he says, uh, I understand you've been in the Coast Guard quite some time and you have never been

to sea. I said that's true. And about that time he asked my wife to come over and talk with him and he was sitting at a table writing stuff down. My wife went over and without looking sat on his hat, not sure. So I guess that kind of ticked him off and the next thing I knew within a few weeks I was aboard ship and I was assigned to a ship which was 311 foot long.

Ernie DeRaps: And I had to be on that vessel for 18 months before I could even ask for a transfer.

Diane: Does that mean you were separated from your family for two years?

Ernie DeRaps: Not Quite. Um, they sent me to South Portland where I was on what they call the Maine State Pier and they put me aboard the ship. Um, we made a few trips out, usually checking for narcotics on vessels that were bringing stuff in and alcohol and so forth. And uh, I was on the vessel for 18 months and I said, I'm going to ask for a transfer. The one I was on was 311 feet long. I was asked for the transfer and where did I go through 311 feet up the dock to another vessel.

Diane: That's pretty exciting.

Ernie DeRaps: So, anyway, I was on that one for a short while and again, after 18 months I asked for a request to transfer and I got on the third ship.

Diane: In the same location?

Ernie DeRaps: In the same location, Portland, South Portland.

Diane: When you were living on those three ships down in Portland and the Portland harbor was the family in Portland?

Ernie DeRaps: I found a place, if I recall, in West Buxton, which is about a 20 minute drive away.

Diane: And you did get to go home?

Ernie DeRaps: When I was in port, but when we went to sea we were gone usually for, 20, 26, 27 days, cause we'd go out and stay in a certain area because we were contacts for vessels coming from Europe and so forth. So, and there was I think five stations,

Alphabet, Bravo, Charlie, Delta and one other. And those were in different portions of the Atlantic Ocean, the one furthest north was almost at the south end of Iceland.

Diane: And uh, you never went up there.

Ernie DeRaps: Oh yeah.

Diane: Oh, you did.

Ernie DeRaps: I remember chipping ice off, that's all. When we get into bad weather, have to go out, one hand for yourself and one for the boat, grab a stick and beat the ice off the vessel.

Ernie DeRaps: My goodness. You've had some adventures, haven't you?

Ernie DeRaps: Oh, a few. Been here and there.

Diane: Which did you like best? Being on the lighthouse or being on the ships or neither?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I liked the lighthouses best because sometimes I even had my family with me. It's all in the book that we had published.

Diane: How old were you when you retired from the coast guard? About.

Ernie DeRaps: I don't know, must've been in my sixties.

Diane: Okay. So you, you followed your wife's advice and you joined the coast guard. Yeah. Had some adventures. You had six kids even though you had all those separations.

Diane: When you were all done with the coast guard, did you get another job someplace?

Ernie DeRaps: I worked for the state of Maine for over 20 years.

Ernie DeRaps: My first job because coming from the military, I knew about the buoy system and I put buoys in the large lakes of Maine for five years. And then I passed it on to someone else to do because they asked me to go to the snowmobile division and

I was in that for five years and building trails throughout the state. And uh, from October through March, I had to go through each of the four districts in Maine to talk on the latest rules and regulations for uh, snowmobiles. So that was an interesting job.

Diane: And then where'd you go?

Ernie DeRaps: I went to the Pesticides Control Board, which was a state and federal job. And my job there was to cover the state. And that was during the time of the budworm program when the budworm were killing the trees and they were spraying herbicides on the trees. And my job was to make sure that they didn't spray it in the water because it would have killed the fish.

Diane: You retired from the state when you were probably about 70, says Patti and then you got another job someplace.

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I found out about a product they called insulated concrete forms. I found out because I went for a trip to Canada with my brother and his wife and my wife and I saw this strange structure being built of polyethylene forms and it was a super-insulated house. So I checked with a local, a builder company up in Belgrade and they said, oh yeah, we can get those things for ya. So I built this house, the first house in Maine to my knowledge of insulated concrete forms. And then when we finished this, my son, the 20 marine who lives two miles up the road, we built his, but mine has a full cellar and his is on a slab, a heated slab. The only heat in this house is in the basement floor, radiant heat. Wow. No heating elements up here on the main floor.

Diane: Did you end up selling this product or did you just use it in your house and your son's house?

Ernie DeRaps: They sold it to me.

Diane: Did you end up working for the company?

Ernie DeRaps: No. I worked at being my own boss with my son and Patti's husband, my son-in-law, and we built over a hundred structures with this material.

Diane: Nice. So you're still earning an income into your seventies?

Ernie DeRaps: Yeah, when I turned 80, that's when the missus said, time for your fifth retirement.

Diane: You needed something to do, but it was your wife's idea that you start painting. Is that right?

Ernie DeRaps: At the age of 80. So that's when she asked me to quit work. She says you work five different jobs, it's time for your retirement. And I said what am I supposed to do? Honey-dos all day. She's the one who says, look, you've got over 3000 colored slides down in the basement. You've been a photographer ever since you took photography in the navy. And I think you should start doing some paintings. So that's when it started.

Diane: So you started painting and you've painted a lot. Everywhere I look, I see these beautiful paintings that you've done.

Diane: You're 91, you're still painting.

Ernie DeRaps: Not so much now I, I've kind of quieted down, but I'm going to a new home and I've got all this stuff to go with me so I can do art down there.

Diane: Well, that's a nice segue because I do have some questions that I want to ask you about, about your life now.

Diane: Like we're sitting here in your living room of the house that you built, except that by the time that this interview is, goes up, by the time I share your interview with the world, you'll be living in the senior facility. It'll be a whole new world for you. Yup. And you're looking forward to it?

Ernie DeRaps: Yes. I'm looking five because it's kind of hard living alone all the time. Uh, I get kind of tired of watching TV, which I don't like that much, but I still, uh, come up with an idea and go do a painting that takes me a few hours. So I just try to stay busy and I walk a lot. That's what helps keep me on.

Diane: Well, you're lucky that you can still walk because some people that I've interviewed in their nineties that's one of the issues. You're tapping your hip, so it's not what it used to be?

Ernie DeRaps: I've got two falls that haven't helped my hips at all and especially this left one.

Diane: Did they break?

Ernie DeRaps: No, I never went to the doctor. I don't know if they broke or not, but I fell on the steps, the concrete step out here.

Diane: You know? That's one of the things that I guess that as I get older I think about, I already notice that I'm more cautious when I walk because you can fall when you're 50 even and you can bounce right back up, but when you get to be 70 or 80 it's different

Ernie DeRaps: I've got a cane, that goes, goes with me wherever I go pretty much now.

Diane: Do you wear hearing aids? I don't see any.

Ernie DeRaps: They're on my dresser. I don't care for them.

Diane: You seem to be hearing me okay.

Ernie DeRaps: Oh yeah. Just this one here, the left one is the worst, but it's a nuisance keeping them on and all that. I'm here alone. I don't talk with anybody half the time except my daughter here who tries to keep me out of trouble.

Diane: I hope not too much. Just got a little twinkle in her eye just like you do.

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I tried to go to the Golden Oldies every Monday and play cribbage. And uh, I get around quite a bit.

Diane: You talk about being alone, is that the same as feeling lonely? Is that what you feel?

Ernie DeRaps: Not really. Naturally, I miss my wife. She passed away five, six years ago and uh I have my children nearby, my 20-year marine is two miles down the road. Patti here is six miles down the road. I've got a daughter in Augusta, my youngest, my youngest son is now living up in Rome and he works for the lumber company up in Belgrade. And my oldest son put himself through five years of college. He's a Baptist minister.

Diane: You know, it's interesting, the reason I wanted to start this whole project is because I went to a conference in which they talked about loneliness and how it's the chronic health condition of our century. But I have to tell you that most of the people I've

interviewed, even the people I expected, you've got to be lonely, will say no, not really. I wish my kids would visit more often, but I've got this to do when that to do well, I just wonder if you think there's some, not necessarily a secret, but how do you, as you get older and you're spending more time alone, keep from being lonely, what, is there a secret?

Ernie DeRaps: I think if there is a secret, it's a fact that you live life as an individual, but you always have friends and if they don't come that often, even though I no longer drive, my daughter takes me here and they, uh, my son takes me here and there, and uh, I keep busy.

Ernie DeRaps: Life is what you make it. That's always been my saying and I've been fortunate enough. Yeah, keep active. That's part of the thing. Keeping active.

Diane: Do people ever talk to you like you're a child or talk in a different way to you or get a little bit of, um, what's the word? Patronizing. Sometimes make assumptions about what you can and can't do?

Ernie DeRaps: Sometimes they do, but I just overlook it. I'm me.

Diane: How would you like to be treated?

Ernie DeRaps: As a person? Ah, I'm still capable. My memory isn't what it used to be, but I've got kids that can help me with some things that I need to know and I'm going to a home shortly, so that'll be a big help. I'll be with other seniors. Yeah.

Diane: I hope that they can keep up with you, Huh?

Diane: What makes it a good day for you?

Ernie DeRaps:

Get my feet on the floor and get moving, that's part of it. And then, um, I have a habit. I have Cream of Wheat almost every morning and all I do is turn on the hot water heater and have my breakfast and then do what has to be done. If anything. Um, I keep an eye on the birds and I feed the birds. I keep an eye on the animals around. I live life.

Diane: Do you think you're going to miss your home when you move to the new senior facility?

Ernie DeRaps: Yes, because I know every inch of it. I built it and uh, at the foot of my bed, about 10 steps. When I get out of the bed, there's a bathroom and there's a laundry room here. I've got the whole basement. That's where I do my artwork and I'll miss it naturally. Cause my wife and I lived here for quite a few years before she passed away.

Diane: you were a beautiful crucifix around your neck. What does it mean to you?

Ernie DeRaps: Well, I'm Catholic and I carry my wife's ring as a reminder, but I don't drive anymore. I'm fortunate that I have a couple that live way over in Dresden that come pick me up Sunday mornings, take me to church and brings me home. And, uh, I just feel that I'm going to keep living life as long as he'll let me.

Diane: When you go to bed at night,

Ernie DeRaps: I say my prayers. I always say my prayers before bed. I wish When I was a youngster, I had to kneel by my mother and say prayers every night before I went to bed. And it's a habit.

Diane: I am going to ask you this one last question. Do you have any advice you'd like to pass on?

Ernie DeRaps: Live life, stay happy, love each other regardless of who they are. Love them.

Diane: You've been listening to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health special series. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Ernie DeRaps, who's 91 years old. Since we had our conversation, Ernie had a change of heart. He decided he didn't want to move into the senior community in Brunswick after all. He wants to stay put in his own home for the time being.

If you have anything to say about our conversation or any of my other Conversations About Aging — please let me know. Something resonated with you, constructive criticism, you want to recommend someone to be interviewed, including yourself, or you'd like to be a podcast sponsor — whatever. I want this podcast to make a difference in people's lives.

If you're listening on a podcast app write a review, if you're on the Catching Health blog, write a comment — or send me an email: diane@dianeatwood.com.

You'll find pictures of Ernie, a written transcript of our interview, pictures of some of his paintings, and other conversations about aging at CatchingHealth.com.

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