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Conversations About Aging: Ann Quinlan, 81 February 10, 2020

Diane: Hello, I'm Diane Atwood and you are listening to Conversations About Aging. For the past year I've been traveling around my home state of Maine interviewing people 60+ about their lives and what's it's like to be getting older. Maine is tied with Florida for having the oldest population in the nation. That means there is a lot of wisdom here and wonderful stories to be told.

Take today's episode, for instance. My guest is in her early 80s and runs two businesses. One of them helping families navigate the world of dementia and the other helping people navigate a journey to her beloved home country. Where is that? Well, I'll let her tell you.

Ann: My name is Anne Quinlan. I am a native of Ireland. I've lived in the United States for many years. And all of my children are first-generation Irish.

Diane: Oh, you haven't lived in the United States for so long that you lost your brogue because it's still there.

Ann: No, no. I think you need to get off the plane in Galway or in Dublin with me and then you'll really hear my Irish accent, yes.

Diane: So it has faded a teeny little bit?

Ann: I mean, I think but also there are so many accents in Ireland and people expect an accent. But there are so many different colloquial forms

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of speaking in Ireland like Dublin I always, we were told it's the best spoken English, king's English in the world because they speak phonetically. You go down into the more rural country areas and they speak faster and they tend to speak within the context of the original language sometimes which would be the Irish language itself. Like you go into parts of Dingle and there are native Irish speakers there. They understand English but they would prefer to speak Irish and you'll find that primarily among the fishing people, the people who are still doing the traditional ways of making a living.

Diane: Well, where did you come from in Ireland?

Ann: I was born about seven miles, I always say from the United Kingdom. I was born in the Republic of Ireland, seven miles from the UK Border.

Diane: Okay, so you're going to have to explain that for people who don't know, what do you mean by the Republic?

Ann: Ireland has 32 counties. We were occupied with many occupiers primarily the British over a period of 4 to 500 years. We were invaded by everybody except the Romans. They didn't make it to Ireland because I think they were too busy across the pond building the Hadrian Wall. But however, we, as a land of people, we go back to prehistoric times. We know that because of all of the geology and the physiology of the land itself, but the Republic of Ireland when Ireland was divided, when they had the partition and England kept those six counties very famous now because of Brexit, so those six counties are in the upper, if you look at them, if anybody's familiar with the map of Ireland, it's like a dog standing on its hind legs and where the ear is the large areas, those are the six counties tucked into the North region, physical, I mean physical region of the

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landmass of Ireland. And called Northern Ireland? It's called Northern Ireland or the six counties or the North, as they call it up there. And so we're on the dog were you born? So, the ear, the ear of the dog. So, the dog is standing, so if you're looking at the map of Ireland, you know, vertically just imagine vertically, that the dog has sort of got its paws off to the west and its hind down at the bottom on the southeast. And then the Southwest would be Kerry, Killarney those regions, but that little ear at the top is that region of the six counties.

Diane: And what brought you to the United States?

Ann: Well, I met a man. My former husband was doing his graduate work in medicine in Boston. And so that's and we met over a summer. He was back on holiday or visiting family and then I ended up coming to Boston and that's where we raised our family.

Diane: So he was from Ireland as well?

Ann: Yeah, from Ireland, a well. Did his graduate, did his undergrad work in Ireland, Universities. College Cork, actually University of medicine there. And then came over and did his graduate work in the Boston area. Well, actually, he started doing his work originally in Pennsylvania, and did some internships there and then became a resident in internal medicine and opened a practice in internal medicine in Boston.

Diane: And you have a nursing background, don't you?

Ann: Well, I started out in nurse's school in England and what would have been equivalent in those days, I mean, I was very young. I went at 17 right

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out of boarding school, so it was like going back into boarding school. To Leicester, my mother had family there, I had an aunt there. So I did what would have been considered now like almost like an LPN course, but I never did anything with that here. I went back to Ireland and did other things. I worked with the National Blood Bank in Dublin, but it was mostly PR and marketing. So that seemed to be my calling at that time.

Diane: At that time? But then you married a man who became a physician. And did you help him in the practice?

Ann: Well, yes, I helped him build a practice. I mean, I had children very quickly. I had four children under the age of six, so my life was very busy with babies. But yes, a lot of our building of that practice would have been, as I mentioned to you earlier, before we began recording, would have been making house calls and visiting. And I think that was a time in my life when I realized, we were both from Ireland, so my children had no cousins here, we had no family here. So essentially, those older patients became kind of grandparents for my children.

Diane: What decade or what year are we talking about that you would make the housecalls? 60s 70s and 80s. The 60s,70s, and 80s that you were making house calls with your husband? Yeah, around Boston. And taking the kids with you?

Ann: I'm taking the kids, especially on a Sunday, like we would get them all, you know, they would all be dressed up for Mass or whatever. And we would then just line them up into the car and go off and make house calls. And especially times like the holidays and Christmas, just going and visiting. I think there were some patients that even my children continued to

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visit after they were in college. I just remember one gentleman I think his, I can't remember his first name. I want to say Mr. Gilbert, but he lived to be well into his 90s and so he knew the children and they would still go visit. So that was something they did continue to do with their dad, you know, even after we had separated and divorced.

Diane: I would like to go back to when your child for a little bit. Yes, of course. So you were born and lived your entire childhood. In Ireland. What was that like? And was it a culture shock when you did come to the United States?

Ann: Very much so. I had a, it's interesting, I'm the youngest of five children. My parents were, my mother was one of 11, my dad was basically an only child. And so he landed in this large loving family, the Powers of Dundalk County Louth and, and my dad basically had, in fact, his work really, he ended up working for the government. He was a regional director for what they called customs and excise back then. And that was part of the reason we were on a border town for a period because all of the excise products came in by train when I was a child, so everything was by train, and they were the war years. So everything was affected by the war. I mean, people know that Ireland was we were neutral, you know. But again, we were very much affected by the Second World War.

Diane: So this was mid-early 40s?

Ann: Well, yeah, the 40s and going even into the 50s, we had ration books. So things, I mean basic products that we would never have been short of like flour, sugar, things like that, which was probably in a way, it was a good thing. I didn't have sugar, probably till the 50s. I don't even things like

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sweets and sugars and so we used a lot of honey and syrups and things like that. And we always had an orchard with fresh fruit. So there was a lot of good, what I would call kind of home cooking but very basic. And so my dad on weekends went with friends and they went hunting. So we ate rabbit. We ate a lot of perch and lake fish and things of that nature, which didn't do us any harm, you know. And you had gardens? And we had gardens and my mother raised chickens during the war. Everybody did back then.

Diane: And I'm going to assume that she was a stay at home mother.

Ann: She was the stay at home mother very, very amazing, actually. I look back now and as I'm getting older and now I'm a grandmother, I appreciate her. She was what I would call, she was almost a medicine woman, she used a lot of natural products. We very rarely ended up going to the doctor unless it was for stitches or something, falling off a bike or things like that. But she had knowledge. She studied nutrition and she had ways, she was also very involved with the Irish Red Cross, which was very active during the war. In fact, she did a lot with training and because we were still at risk of invasion, you know, by Germany, I remember as a small child being carried out of my crib and brought out into the garden because there was a blackout and the Germans were flying over our area because they were trying, doing their best to bomb Belfast. Because Belfast was not that far, it was just about 55-60 miles from where we were living.

Diane: So even though it was that distance away, you were still in danger?

Ann: Yes, we were, and I do remember being I'm going to say I don't I mean, I might have been three or four or five those ages, but I do

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remember the war. And I remember my dad had a big map with pins where we marked where, where Hitler was, you know, the fall of Poland, Warsaw. So we saw a lot of that, and again, what I do remember about this was later on probably, we moved then to County Meath, we moved closer to Dublin, so I was about nine then. And that was a tough move for me because I was leaving friends and I was leaving, you know, just what had been familiar to me for the first nine years of my life. And we lived at the edge of a 1000 acre forest, which was pretty amazing. That was our playground.

Diane: Why did you move?

Ann: Well, because of my dad's work, you know, again, he was moving, the war was over. This would have been the late late 40s. We moved up to his office then was located at the Custom House in Drogheda, which is one of the was one of there was a seaport, a river, the Boyne River came in through there. So a lot of the excise goods and things that would have involved his work would have been there. And then we lived we had a wonderful house. We lived out in Duleek, County Meath, and we lived and it was four acres of land and trees. It was heaven. And so I mean, that part of it worked out really well for me, but I went to school for the first I went to a little day school for the first probably four years after we moved there. And then I went to boarding school.

Diane: Now why boarding school? Is that just what happened?

Ann: A lot of children did and I think being the youngest of five, maybe my mother was tired of raising kids. Who knows? You never asked her? Well, it was a good experience. I was homesick, but I wasn't that far from home. I mean, they would come and visit on the weekends they would hop in the

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car and come over. So, but I got a wonderful education. I got a wonderful, in Ireland, I say this to people again and again, I got an incredible classical education. Now what do you mean by a classical? The boys got Greek, we got French and music. And so the classical education would have been more focused on the arts and so for that I'm eternally grateful.

Diane: Because you're an artistic soul I think, just looking around here.

Ann: Yes, yes, and also just the joy of writing and poetry and all of those things that were very big in my home as well. I mean, we had, that's what we did. We read and we listened to radio.

Ann: I think they just, um, they were very involved in theater. I'll show you a picture before you leave of the big theater group that my dad, that's how my dad met my mom, was through theater. They both were in the theater? Yeah, community theater. And he wrote some plays, you know, just short plays that he produced and directed. He directed me in a couple of plays when I was older, but so theater was a big part of our lives, theater and music. I would say.

My dad really wanted me to go on and study at the Conservatory of Music in Dublin because I studied music. That was the big piece of what I did do in boarding school. I started studying piano when I was about nine or 10. And then I continued doing that. And then I took up cello, had a wonderful cello teacher, too. She was a nun and the fun thing about her, Sister Frances, she, she was a great cellist and she would we've got down into the music room, and she had to pin her veil behind her head so she could get the, the arm of the cello up over her shoulder. So we had some laughs together, but she was wonderful. They were really kind. I have no memory

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of harshness in any way. So I landed in a really nice school, and it was and I made close friends. I've actually brought my younger children back to visit many, many years ago. And my art teacher was still there. So yeah, again, it was a change, but I adjusted and I think it taught me something about becoming independent. You know, you know how things like that do? They sort of change you in a way? So when I went home as still the youngest of the family and when we gathered with cousins and friends and everything, I always felt not apart, that's not, I didn't feel apart from them, but I felt a little bit different because I was away.

Diane: And none of your siblings went away?

Ann: My older brother Michael, who's actually gone to his maker some years ago. He he was the second oldest of the family, and he did his final year in high school. He did do boarding school. I think he came home on weekends, but it was a boys school, obviously an all boys school. Different school. Yeah.

Diane: So after you graduated from secondary school, and then you went to England?

Ann: Well, yeah, that was back, I mean, I had been home for probably about the whole summer, obviously and then I started off in. It's interesting that I applied to nursing school in Belfast, but my dad's said let's just let's just experiment with this, because a lot of people don't understand that even though I was admitted to nursing school in England as a Catholic, I could not be admitted to nursing school in the six counties of the North because I was Catholic. Oh. So one of their requirements on there was you had to put down your religion and I remember filling out that application. I

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think it was probably for Queens or something. I don't remember the nursing school, one of the nursing schools in Belfast, and so the question was, what was my religion? So I checked off Catholic and, obviously, I was turned down. You were immediately disqualified? Yeah, disqualified. But ironically, I could go to the British Isles and go.

Diane: It doesn't make sense to me.

Ann: But that was the, and I think people now observing or watching Brexit and what's happening with those six counties. Personally in my lifetime, maybe not in my lifetime, but certainly my children's lifetime and grandchildren's, Ireland will be united again. It's bubbling up now and a lot of the younger generation, they've been crossing that border for 21 years with no customs. So they've discovered family in the other, in the Republic, and they've gotten to know younger people, they've socialized in the Republic of Ireland, all those things that would have been verboten, so to speak. When I mean when it was really intense during especially what they call the Troubles, but people forget. I mean, the greatest book ever written, was written by a Jewish writer, which is *Trinity*, written by? Leon Uris. Leon Uris, and I think this is an interesting thing about the Irish that so much oppression over time, you know, of the occupation, the gentry came in, they took over our land, all of those things, that before the Elizabethan period, you know, we had, we had laws of equality, we had the Brehon Laws. I could do a whole, we could do a whole conversation on them. But the Brehon Laws existed and the Brits, the English, the Elizabethans tried to assimilate some of those laws when they first landed, when they became the landed gentry. Prior to that, of course, we had the Anglo Norman invasion, we had the Norman invasions, we had all these people

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plundering, and taking over land. It's a small island, you know, it was easy to get to.

Diane: Can you easily trace your genealogy?

Ann: Well, my genealogy, interestingly enough, I did my DNA several years ago. I was on the board of the Maine Irish Heritage Center here and somebody said, why are you doing your DNA? You're 100% Irish and I said, nobody's 100% anything. Well, guess what? I'm 7% Asian.

Diane: And what about your children? Your children you said we're first generation. First generation American, yeah. But how invested are they in their family history?

Ann: Well, that's interesting. I think they're more so as they get older and now that they have children, they're more interested. So they've been to Ireland over and over again. They have obviously, dual nationality, so they have dual citizenship and so do their children. So that stops at the third generation, but that began after the, I believe after the hundredth anniversary, I want to say the hundredth anniversary of the famine. Do you know what's really interesting, Diane? I grew up in Ireland, was educated in Ireland, you know, voracious readers. I mean, that's all we did. My parents were voracious readers. I mean, we lived at the library. We had book clubs, that book came every month, we thought over who got to read it first, but it's interesting to me that not one unit in either primary, grammar school or secondary school, not one unit did I have on the famine.

Diane: And why do you suppose that is because they don't want people to remember it?

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Ann: I think it was. I think if you look at the period, it was still very close to what happened to grandparents and great grandparents. I think it was close and it was painful, maybe. Right, so people couldn't bear to have to read about it or acknowledge it even. Yeah, and also, I think people who survived it had this thing called survival guilt, whatever that is. That's a good Christian word anyway, you know, if you if you want to go into that guilt place, but having shame around it. Shame is a much better word. There's shame around, and again, I don't know, I find I could rarely get my mother to talk about that. My dad talked a little bit about it, but not, you know, expansively in that way. I finally got my mother to talk about it.

And the two families. The Powers, which would have come in with the Normans, that would have been Delapierre, they were the French would have come in. Now this is mother's family? My mother's family. Her father. So, her father, grandfather, great grandfather, well not so much her father because obviously he, well, this would have been more recent. but her grandfather, great grandfather and possibly great, great grand parents on the Powers side, they were they were coach builders. They knew how to build coaches for the gentry. So they didn't go hungry. They were artisans. Then there was another side, on the Russell side, that were, they were apparently stained glass makers. So they were artisans and so anybody who had a craft like that would have been in demand. But no farmers would have? Well, the farmer, oh yeah, the farmers lost their land. That's where the tenant farmacy came, the whole farmer, tenancy thing came in, that's where the famine really hit badly.

Diane: And it affected your family? Yeah.

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Ann: And again, I don't know all of the history of the other side. But the point was that when they came and demanded, took the land, the farmland, which was richer farmland that became valuable to these invaders, basically. Then those people got to stay on their land, but they then had to pay as tenants, they had to pay rent to the people who stole their land.

Diane: An age-old story isn't it? It is and it's always been so. So now I want to have a little bit of fun. I want you to dispel any myths or stories about Ireland. You were telling me when I first came into your apartment about four-leaf clovers? No you were telling me about shamrocks? Yes. That it's really the harp.

Ann: You noticed my harp. This is a small Celtic harp. Yeah, the harp really is the symbol of Ireland. And you'd have to go back to the famous Brian Boru Battle of Clontarf, you know, and the last great high King of Ireland and he always brought his harp with him to battle. So but the harp goes back centuries in Ireland, so that really is the emblem.

And the bards would take the harp with them and they would go from place to place and they would play the music sort of like the story. So the harp, the music would accompany the storytellers or they would tell a story or they would sing a song. So that became kind of the fireside instrument or the community instrument. And so I don't have a lot of knowledge about the origin, the actual origin or how early this appeared, but I'm going to say pretty early on, probably even when the monks first came sixth century, maybe even before then.

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Diane: You know so much about Ireland, not just because that's where you're from, but you also lead trips to Ireland and have been doing that for what? Decades?

Ann: 1988 I started doing this. Well, what happened was when we were raising my children in Massachusetts, people would come to me and say, we're going to Ireland, and, you know, where should we go? But my first question I was, still is, why do you want to go to Ireland? And everybody has a different answer. Well, my great grandparents were there. I've always wanted to go. It looks beautiful. I'm interested in the history, I studied Irish history. You know, there's a million reasons why people want to go.

But I think that part of the attraction for me in doing this and developing it over time is that, and it's interesting, my parents were very committed to our seeing Ireland before we went anywhere else. They really felt it important for us to know our own people, our own geography, our own history, right down to megalithic and when we moved to County Meath we moved literally seven miles from Newgrange. I don't know if you know about Newgrange, but that's the solar, the oldest one of the oldest solar observatories in the world. So it predates the pyramids, and that's a huge tourist attraction for people. But so I think knowing one's own country is important.

Diane: So you've been leading these journeys? Yes. And you're, you have a business called Spiral Journeys. Where does the spiral come from?

Ann: Spiral Journeys, if you look at the little triple spiral there that is the spiral that was discovered inside Newgrange and that's the triple spiral. It's not just endemic, I think to the Celtic to the early Celts or whoever they

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were, those early people who probably came on an ice floe or something. It's a symbol of birth, life and death.

Diane: So the journeys, your spiral journeys, people sign up, you take a group of how many people a couple of times a year do you take them?

Ann: So I would like to do more than twice a year but I have a group now going in the spring in May of 2020. Ten is a great number for me, and the hidden Ireland piece of this are these restored mansions and Manor houses that have become these private living, they're private, they're not really hotels but they're beautiful places on land where we can stay and then we go off every day. After breakfast we go off so I have vendors I work with, I have an archaeologist I work with over there. So I people we go off to a different area every day or a different site every day.

Diane: So is hidden Ireland one of the tours that you take people on or is it the tour?

Ann: Well, I consider hidden Ireland the pieces of Ireland that you don't see on a regular tour. I think I use it in that context as well. Because a lot of times if you go with a large group, which is fine, people go they're in a different bed every night or every other night. We just stay in we I usually generally at the very most three bases but usually two over a period of 12 days.

Diane: I think it's almost a stupid question to ask you. What do you love about Ireland? I don't think there's anything you don't love about Ireland.

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Ann: No, there really isn't. I'm sort of reignited each time. I tend to be ignited when I talk about it, as you probably have gathered.

Diane: You're 81 years old now and you are still leading these journeys, which must take its toll on anybody of any age to put this all together and then go over there.

Ann: Yeah, got to stay in shape. You got to get up and walk every day. Gotta get up and move every day. Which you do. Gotta up and talk every day. No, I think it's interesting because I think I'm very fortunate. I've inherited really good, you know, genes. I'm sure it's a big part of it, but also, I'm committed, and I'm very passionate about what I do whether it's in the aging end of things.

I see the ocean for want of a better word of fear around aging. And it's not that I fight that, I just embrace my own aging. And I feel that if we don't do that, it's just another stage of life. We come in, we live, and we leave. Just like the spiral. Just like the spiral. Exactly. And I feel that if we're, if we're, if we have all this anxiety and it's promoted in our culture, it's promoted, you know, it's all about, you know, pretending that you're not aging, like getting fixed so you don't look your age. What does that mean?

Diane: I've talked to enough people now who are in their 90s. Yes. And they will tell me about how good things were up until a certain age and then they started noticing things. And so what I have come away with is this notion that you have to do what you can while you can. Yes. And then you kind of like every morning you get up and you assess things. Yeah. But you also have to use it. Yeah. Or you're more apt to lose it more quickly. Right. And that includes mind body spirit, everything.

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Ann: I'm also a certified Reiki master so I do, I believe in the work of energy healing as well. And I can do it on myself, you know. I'm very careful in my walking and like getting in and out of the tub in the shower. I've got bars here, I mean, so there are things that one does that really are common sense. It's not that I'm invincible in any way. You know, I'm obviously an older person, but I'm committed to a good quality of life and that's one of the reasons I moved here, too.

Diane: You're now in a senior community.

Ann: Well, I mean, it's really 55 plus, I'm a lot older than 55. Most of us in here are actually.

I've tried to stay in touch with other ages. I believe that if we isolate into a certain, we categorize ourselves into a certain aging process and we're not around all ages, then we're missing out. Because what are we doing if we're not passing on some wisdom, some, you know, when I sit with the grands with the little grandkids or whatever we're doing, I'm telling stories and talking about because they want to know and I wanted to know at that age. So what did you do when you were bababa, you know,

Diane: Your life is being enriched and their lives are being enriched, as well.

Ann: Yeah, and we're missing out on that because we don't, we create communities that don't involve intergenerational. They're not exposed and I think the wisdom of the elders is quote coming back. It's becoming more in vogue and I think an elder going into a community where there are children.

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You know, I work so you know, so I don't have a lot of time to volunteer, I've done a lot of volunteer work in my time, but I still give blood, been doing that my whole life. But I think the value of, well all I can offer is the value of my own life experience. Beyond that, you know, I see that as, as having, as being a kind of treasure that I carry within me and that's what the treasure of memory and long-term memory is really what we have, and for people losing memory, being able to tap into long-term memory is extremely valuable.

Diane: You alluded to working in the aging field. So you don't just plan these incredible journeys to Ireland, you have a totally different business.

Ann: Yeah, yeah, I began, I started my company Healthy Aging Matters, probably around 2000, I'm going to say. 2001.

Ann: I coach families who are managing someone with cognitive decline. But more importantly, and what I began to do more and more is I'm really a navigator. I understand the health system, which has become so challenging and confusing. Just the language of healthcare, the whole lexicon, you know, around that is confusing. How do families find you? Referral.

Diane: Well, so here you are. You are very, very active. But what about your own thoughts on aging? You've told us a little bit. Do you have concerns? Do you have plans? Do you have?

Ann: Concerns? Yeah, I mean, I think that's, you know, obviously in life we have I have concerns, you know, but I don't feel alone. That's important. I don't feel alone or isolated. And I think that isolation really is I think that's a

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big promoter of mortality and so I don't isolate. I love my solitude and I relish that. I'm big on nature. I mean, the natural world for me is my church. I'm not involved with a church community, but I do go over to Audubon, this brings me back to my early childhood, and I think it's interesting that the land again, go back to that land experience, that the land really is very healing. And we know more and more now about the healing forest experience and all of that, but I always knew that, so, but yeah, no, I mean, I, I'm, I have wonderful children, you know, I, I reach out to them, they sometimes say so what's your plan Mom? And I say well, I'm, I'm now living in a community. So that was a plan that worked out really well. And, but again, I feel I don't look down the road that much in terms of what would it look like? I mean, that probably sounds somewhat. I'm not avoiding that whole conversation.

Diane: But it's not something that you. I don't dwell on it. Wake up and think, okay, gee, 10 years from now, I wonder what my life will be like?

Ann: I don't dwell on it. I don't, I don't dwell. What's the point?

Diane: The reason I started doing this podcast is because I went to a conference about loneliness. Yes. So, in your line of work, do you see a lot of loneliness?

Ann: I see loneliness as something that does not get revealed if the family is around. They don't acknowledge the loneliness. So very often when I'm with that person, I'm talking about the elder, without other people around, they will acknowledge that.

Diane: How did they acknowledge it to you?

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Ann: It's, um, well, people don't call me anymore, you know, especially if they have memory issues. You know, I'll say to people around people with cognitive decline, the kindest thing you can do is ring the doorbell. You know, listen to that person. Bring something that you know is familiar to them. Bring something that was their favorite. If you've been a friend all those years, what are you afraid of? That they're not going to recognize you? So you become a new person every day. You know, I'm your new friend.

Diane: Back to you. Yes. This is lovely. I'm enjoying it. Oh, I'm glad, me too. And I've learned so much about the history of Ireland. Well, there's more. It's a very old country. I'll have to go on a trip. It's older than dirt. You'll have to come on a trip, that's right, I will. I always ask people this matter how young they are on the aging spectrum. What makes it a good day for you?

Ann: What makes it a good day? Well, I must say that as I get older when the sun is shining is really a good day. I'm a morning person. I was born at 3:10 in the morning, I don't always get up at 3:10 in the morning. To celebrate your birth? No, but I'm very rarely asleep after five in the morning, so I get up early. I love the mornings. I love the morning. So making it a good day for me is getting up on a bright sunny morning, taking a walk once the light comes up. I don't walk in the dark, I don't think that's smart at my age, I mean who wants to carry a flashlight and walk around in the dark at five o'clock in the morning? But I'd say, what makes it a good day for me?

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I'm very passionate about what I do with my work. So continuing to design these trips, responding to people and also working with the aging process, communicating with families, but also seeing my grandchildren, you know. How many do you have? I have six, two here, two in Massachusetts. Well, Olivia now is in college, she'll be 20 and can't believe she'll be 20 in March. And two in Brooklyn, New York so I don't see them a lot, but we're all on the east coast. So, which is nice. And, you know, I Skype. I talk to Ireland quite a lot. Right now I'm organizing two other groups. I'm talking to Ireland a lot. And I have WhatsApp so. I have a sister in Canada, we talk on the phone, and what I'm reading, poetry, writing, I enjoy writing..

Diane: You're busy. You're very, very busy. I try not to be busy. I try to be productive. Okay, there's a difference. Yes. Because there's you're busy, you're just like looking for things to do, right?

Ann: So I'm older. So I need to be productive with whatever time I have left.

Diane: That's an interesting statement. Yeah, yeah.

Ann: You know, I've done I've done a lot of in depth workshops and different things, spiritual experiences and stuff, retreats. And Ram Das is a good old friend of mine, and I've certainly, I still listen to him sometimes. I think humor if we can really laugh at ourselves and not take things so seriously.

I learned something. It's interesting. I have a wonderful wonderful friend Betty Belong. She was a VNA nurse in Boston, extraordinary woman, raised a family and we just had this lovely friendship and when I was doing

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this work and she was still involved in her career, nursing. But then as she got older, she and she was never ill, she loved to go dancing. She was a ballet, she'd been a ballet dancer. She was an amazing human being. She was a lot of fun. And I remember one of the things one of her phrases was whenever something would come up like a crisis or somebody would be should say, Well, you know, we're all just passing through. And this is our turn. So if I think about it that way, then what can I do? This is my shift, so to speak. It's my shift on the planet. So what can I do? I can't fix all of what is going on out there. What I can do is do something small every day, that can make a difference. Whether it's a small donation or whether marching, which I do, I'm political in that sense. I'm an activist in that way. You know, if there's a march for climate or there's a march for poverty, whatever that is, I will go, I'm out there. So I'm one of those grandmothers that that hopefully, you know, my children and grandchildren coming along, you know, recognize that that's who I am.

Diane: We're just all passing through. Yeah.

Ann: But when I'm gone, does my light go out, you know? Or is there some little glimmer left behind?

Diane: And so when you're when you breathe your last breath. Yeah, yeah, um.

Ann: I want music, I want like the birds singing in my ears. That's what I did when I had my hips replaced. I had my I did them with my earbuds in and I had bird songs. The voices of my children and grandchildren and bird songs.

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Diane: Okay, I'll give you the last word. I'm sure there are things that you wish I'd asked you. No, no, no, no, there's no right or wrong. So we're all set? We're all set. Thank you so much, Diane. It was lovely. It was lovely. It was lovely. You've got some editing to do!

Diane: You've been listening to *Conversations About Aging*, a Catching Health Podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Ann Quinlan, born and raised in Ireland and now at 81, living a busy life in Falmouth, Maine.

If you enjoyed my conversation with Ann, please share it with a friend. You'll find more episodes on my blog Catching Health at CatchingHealth.com.

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