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Conversations About Aging: Jim Mardin, 98

Jim: You've got to keep busy. You've got to meet people. You've got to get out in the world. You can't stay home, watch television, and read. Do what I'm doing. Get out there.

Diane: Hello and welcome to a conversation about aging. That was Jim Mardin passing on a little bit of advice. He is 98 years old. So I'd say he knows what he's talking about. I'm Diane Atwood, producer and host of the blog and podcast catching health. Until COVID-19 hit, I'd been traveling around my home state of Maine interviewing people 60 and older about their lives past and present for a special podcast project I call Conversations About Aging. Back in early March, Jim and I sat at the dining room table in his condo, overlooking the city of Portland, Maine on the Eastern Promenade. Jim is a born storyteller and he has lots of stories to tell. They'll make you laugh, make you think, and some may make you cry but mostly, I think you'll be inspired by his positive outlook on life. Even during these difficult times. Ever since he was in high school, back in the 1940s, Jim has volunteered in one way or another. For the past 30 years or so since his retirement, he's been a faithful volunteer at Maine Medical Center logging more than 11,000 hours of service. Before the pandemic, he volunteered three days a week. At 98, greeting people visiting an outpatient orthopedics practice. It's a job he loved doing. And it's one he obviously did well.

So I'm going to read this email that they got at the Maine Health office where you volunteer. "I visited this office today and I had the loveliest experience. One of your volunteers met me at the front door with the most wonderful smile and was so friendly. He was an older gentleman

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and he made my entire day." Your face. You've got a big wide grin. That makes you happy, doesn't it?

Jim: Right, right. It's what I do every day. It's the same thing every day, and they'll leave saying what a beautiful smile. But along with the smile is the whole thing that goes with it; it's not just a smile alone. It's the whole atmosphere.

Diane: And the fact that at 98, you just had a birthday too, right? January 23rd, did I see was your birthday? Correct. Happy Birthday. I think that's how I caught wind of you because Maine Health wished you happy birthday on Facebook. Right. And I saw it and I said, oh my goodness. There's the picture right there. When I saw that you were 98, I said, I need to track this man down and interview him for *Conversations About Aging*. So they found you, you're easy to find. Right. Yeah. So three days a week you go there?

Jim: Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. And my girlfriend goes there too.

Diane: Oh, there's a whole other story. I didn't know you had a girlfriend.

Jim: Yeah, she works in radiology. She takes the people out and changes their gowns and things.

Diane: Oh, how old is she? 93. And is that where you met?

Jim: We met in Maine Med. When my wife made me go to Maine Med when I retired to be doing something, they decided I should be doing patients' mail and Lucy was doing patients' mail and she broke me in. And since that time we've been in the hospital off and on doing different things together. And after my wife died and her husband died years later, we finally got together and I live here and she lives in Yarmouth.

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Diane: Lucy. Her name is Lucy?

Jim: Lucy, Yeah.

Diane: That's a beautiful name. Yes. All right. Well, I want to talk more about this in a second. I'd like to ask you first what it does for you to be able to go out and work. I mean, you're a volunteer, but you're working. Right. What does it do for you?

Jim: You can't believe the number of people who come in who are elderly or are getting ready to retire or something, and they're asking me how I do it. I said you've got to keep busy. You've got to meet people. You've got to get out in the world. You can't stay home and watch television and read. Do what I'm doing it. Get out there.

Diane: What do you think it is? Do you think that people, some people as they age, they just lose their drive, their motivation, they give up?

Jim: I think it's, it's, it's the atmosphere they live in and who they live with.

Diane: So what do you think is the best kind of living situation?

Jim: If they live alone at home, they're apt to get into a rut and not feel like going out by themselves unless they have friends that would do things with them. They aren't moved to do anything.

Diane: Well, you live alone.

Jim: But I have a girlfriend. It makes a difference. We both do things together. You need to have somebody you can do things with. Nothing's good alone. I don't care what you're doing. Alone, it's lonely. The word for it is lonely. And if you're alone, it gets worse and worse.

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Diane: So I've talked to some people, not necessarily interviewed them, but talked to people who are older who say, well, there'll never be anybody like my husband or wife. I don't want to meet anybody else. Oh no, I don't want romance. You know, they have a billion excuses, but what I hear you talking about more than anything is companionship.

Jim: Right. Male or female. It doesn't matter.

Diane: Just to have somebody that you can share things with.

Jim: If you live alone, you got to find somebody else and maybe they're alone, but the two of you together is what you've got to have to keep staying alive.

Diane: What do you and Lucy enjoy doing?

Jim: We play cards. We're doing puzzles right now. We go to the movies, we just enjoy each other. Every day we enjoy each other.

Diane: I had a gentleman that I knew years ago, I did some stories about him. His name is Fred Hale and he lived to be 104 and he said...

Jim: I'm going to try for 112, so that's ...

Diane: Okay. You want to set real records? He said his secret was bee pollen. He did bee pollen every day and he also saw his chiropractor, but he had a girlfriend and they would call each other up. They would take turns; I think every morning to make sure that they were alive.

Jim: Call every morning, when we aren't at work, we call, make sure we're alive.

Diane: Well, you've got to have a, a healthy perspective. You seem like an optimistic kind of a person.

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Jim: Positively. Always have had, from day one, I've always been optimistic. Never was, well, I didn't lose a day of school. I didn't lose a day at work. I've always been healthy, but it's your attitude, when you say optimistic, the whole thing is going to be just with it.

Diane: But you acknowledge that you are 98 years old. You can't deny it. Right. You acknowledge it.

Jim: I admit to it.

Diane: But you don't dwell...

Jim: Nobody realizes it looking at me because I don't act like a 98 year old.

Diane: So when you put your head down on the pillow at night ...

Jim: I go to sleep.

Diane: And when you wake up?

Jim: I think of what I'm going to do today.

Diane: See I think that's a key issue you think about, all right, what am I going to do today? And what do you do on the days when you're not volunteering?

Jim: Well, every day, I'm going to end up in Yarmouth, no matter what, the day. We meet Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. We meet at the parking lot at the building I work in. The rest of the week, we call each other eight o'clock and by noontime, I'm out to her house and we do something during the day. Yesterday we went to a funeral.

Diane: Do you think you'll ever get married?

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Jim: it's nice being independent and she has her house, I got mine. It's nice to be an independent. Who knows?

Diane: Hmm. Do you have kids?

Jim: Yes. My wife and I tried to have children for a long time and the doctor had a girl that was going to give a child up for adoption. He thought we might be interested, so we agreed and we adopted a little girl. And a year later, had the same problem. And so we adopted a little boy and later on, I had the same problem and we were going to adopt a little girl, but she changed her mind, so we said we settled with the two children. Today my son lives in Portsmouth and my daughter lives in South Portland. I have four grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Diane: How important is family to you?

Jim: The whole thing's important. I mean, once you get my age, if it weren't for the family you'd really be alone here in the world, and there are people like that, they're this is it. This is the end.

Diane: I'm curious if the kids, well, your son and daughter must be what? In their seventies now? So are they protective of you in any way or do they know better?

Jim: They, they call me and my son came and gave me a new television and back in when I was in my 80s, he got me into computers and things and I have my own laptop.

Diane: So you've just given me another key. And that is always be open to learning new things, even technology, because there are some people who'll say, Oh my God, I don't even want to touch that. I can't begin to understand it.

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Jim: I lease cars, so I get a new car every three years and you can't believe the computer in that thing. If you didn't know computers, you can't drive anymore. You can't operate the controls.

Diane: But it didn't stop you?

Jim: Course not. Nothing stops me.

Diane: I want to go back in time. You were born in when?

Jim: 1922.

Diane: You were born in 1922 here in Maine?

Jim: I was born in a birthing home in South Portland and many, many, many years later we had an apartment on the same street that I was born in.

Diane: Interesting. And you were the oldest in the middle? The youngest?

Jim: I was the youngest. I had two sisters. One was 10 years older and the other one was 12 years older. So they probably babysit me, but I don't remember.

Diane: And they lived to be older.

Jim: They died at 95 and 96.

Diane: Okay. So you all got the longevity gene.

Jim: Right. Right.

Diane: Definitely. Definitely. What about your mother?

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My mother was 80 something when she died. She was living with my sister, but I think she was 80 something. Okay. The family kind of separated over the years. Of course, my father left.

Right, you started to tell me that before we turned on the tape recorder. When you were how old? Five years old?

Jim: When I was five years old, my father had been a railroad engineer and made good money, I guess. But then he took into doing some real estate work and somehow or other got into trouble cause when I was five, overnight he was gone and nobody seemed to know where he went and my mother admitted she didn't know where he was. So she was left with three children.

Diane: And did your mother work outside the home?

Jim: Not at the time she didn't.

Diane: So he just up and left her. Right. Didn't leave her a pack of money or a note.

Jim: Nothing. Whoa. So she immediately took my two sisters into private homes as, helping people bring up their children. And from then on, they were gone from me and she took me out to Gorham, Maine. And she paid \$5 a week for me to live there and I lived there until the end of the fourth grade.

Diane: So you boarded with a family in Gorham. A man and a wife. She paid the \$5 and they took care of you. Did you have to work for them?

Jim: I was only five. I just became a member of the family, and it was a house in the middle of town and we actually had a back house in the back, a two-holer. They had no bathroom. Had my own bedroom and

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that's the way I lived until I moved over to Portland doing the same thing for the fifth grade.

Diane: Did you ever live with your mother again?

Jim: Yeah, yes, I did. You're going ahead in the story a little bit.

Diane: I'm sorry. I apologize.

Jim: I came back, I came back to Portland and boarded with a retired schoolteacher and I stayed with her until I got to high school. And when I got to high school, first year of high school, my mother began housekeeping and she and I lived together.

She worked as a cafeteria at Deering High School, and I went to Deering High School, and in the afternoons, I worked in the First National Grocery Store, Deering Center, every afternoon and Saturdays and Sundays, they were closed in those days.

Diane: Do you have any memories of the first family you lived with?

Jim: Yeah, he worked in the mill town of Westbrook. He took the little train that went down by the house. We had a one-car train. He took that every morning to work. Every night he came home. We had chickens. I had a Collie dog. His wife had a heart problem, had medicines. One time I went to the drugstore, got the medicine, on the way home, it fell out of the bag and broke. And it scared me so that I took off down the railroad tracks and walked to Portland. My mother was living with a woman that she was taking care of. And for some reason or other I knew where exactly where she lived. But I was able to walk down the railroad tracks to Westbrook, follow the roads into Portland and find her. Meantime, back in Gorham they have a search party out. Well, I actually did run away and then I must have been about eight years old then.

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Diane: But by then they knew you pretty well. They knew that you had done it because something was wrong. Right. Yeah. So it sounds like it was a good home that you were in.

Jim: The home was perfect, but there was nothing except the woman was partly ill, so she wasn't capable of doing all the work herself. Other than that, I was fed well and kept well until my mother moved me to Portland. No problem.

Diane: Do you know why she moved you to Portland?

Jim: I think maybe to be nearer her. That's all I could figure out.

Diane: Did you get to see her much when you were living in Gorham?

She'd take the streetcar out some days and once in a while take me back into Portland and take me to the five and 10 and we'd have lunch and walk around. And I guess she'd probably put me on the streetcar back to Gorham. By yourself? Yeah. Then I'd go back home again.

Well, that certainly probably helped build your character.

Jim: Right.

Diane: And I'm glad that you were in a good home.

Jim: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, no, I have no complaints.

Diane: Did you stay in touch with those people even after you left? Do you remember?

Jim: No I didn't, no I didn't.

Diane: So in Portland, you lived with another family?

Jim: On Revere Street.

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Diane: And was that a good situation, too?

Jim: That was a very good situation. I was older then, I was going to the fifth grade and I'd go to school every day on Stevens Avenue, it was fifth grade to sixth grade and junior high school, and Deering High School, all in a row. Portland on Revere Street, I remember the railroad track there. In those days, they used to put down the gate, then they'd hang a lantern on the gates so cars coming back and forth. But, the nighttime, no one was there. So I got down there, I knew the gate tender and he used to put down the gate and I used to hang the lanterns on the gates.

Diane: That's fun.

Jim: Well, I, I, went to school there every day. I had friends and by the time I got to a high school, I was living with my mother.

Diane: And where did you and your mother live?

Jim: We lived up near Deering Center, not too far from the high school, so we could both go to school everyday. She worked and I was in school. I worked in the store right across the street where the church was; it was the store I worked in. It was a First National. It used to be A&P in those days. And the First National, I worked in that one, just the manager and myself. And in those days you went around with all the shelves, as each person wanted something, they showed you what they want. You put it down, put it on the counter and then you took one of those big paper, brown paper bag, you listed all the stuff on there. If they had 20 items, you had 20 numbers, you added it all up yourself, get a total went back to the cash register, we took the money, ran the cash register to total. Give them the change and that was it. But in those days, you sold the vegetables in bulk; you sold the cheese in bulk. The butter was in quarter pound packages. I remember that was because the poor widows used to

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come and buy one of these quarter pound packages in those days, but I worked in there all through high school.

Diane: Far cry from today where you just go in there, you can pay for things with your phone right now.

Jim: Imagine a high school kid adding up the whole column of figures and everybody agreed to it and they give you the money and you go to the cash register. Just like all the cash register does is take the money.

Diane: Thank God you're trustworthy.

Jim: Thank God I could add.

Diane: Thank God you could add is right. So you graduated from during high school?

Jim: Yes. When I was 17, I went down and joined the National Guard because not having a father; I never got any learning from what a father would give me. So I figured if I went down and joined the National Guard, I might get some kind of training. So I joined the guard when I was a junior in high school. I think my mother probably had to sign for me.

I graduated from Deering High School in June of 1940, in September, we went to camp in Fort Williams for the summer, it's three weeks. In September, they called the National Guard into federal service. So I was now in the army, September 16th, 1940, stationed in Fort Williams as a private.

Diane: So you were stationed in the army out at Fort Williams?

Jim: In Fort Williams.

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Diane: In Fort Williams. And what did you do there?

Jim: We were the coast artillery. In those days there was a coast artillery and an infantry at the National Guard outfit in town. We had twelve-inch guns to defend the harbor against if there was a war we would defend the harbor against the enemy.

Diane: Were you ever in a position when you were at Fort Williams to have to defend the coast?

Jim: No, because the war wasn't even declared. This was 1940 and I'm in the service in 41 when Pearl Harbor came, I was already in the service for over a year and the Germans were off shore for some reason at some time, but there was never any shooting going on in Portland or Portland Harbor.

Diane: And at some point then you were shipped out, though, right? You left Fort Williams. Where'd you go?

Jim: I'll tell you how I got out. I was there, I was a staff sergeant. In fact, I would have been there forever for the whole war. I decided the war was going along without me. They needed me. So I applied for a course in for engineering and I read constantly so I knew all the tools that were used. I knew what they did. I took all the exams and went down to University of New Hampshire. Took all the examinations they had, passed them all and they sent me Norwich University, it's a military academy up in Vermont. That's how I got out of Fort Williams. So I went up there to college to be an engineer. Well, I took the commercial course in high school, so when it came to all the technical things that I was just lost. Actually I had been a staff Sergeant and had to take it back to private to go to college. So I got it in college. I get to the office there and they say well, now you're a platoon leader. You've got the first platoon and this

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fella here has got the second platoon. So here I am now, I'm a private, even though I'd been a staff sergeant before and knew what I was doing, I was still only a private and I'm a platoon leader after being up there about five months I flunked out. I couldn't do it. Yeah. Sotheyby sent me down to South Carolina to a repo depot.

Diane: Say that again? I want to make sure I get that right. Repo depo?

Jim: Replacement Depot.

Diane: Huh?

Jim: They put me in an outfit in Fort Davis, South Carolina, I think it was. Anyway, they put me in an anti aircraft outfit as the company clerk, and I worked with the adjutant and I stayed a private and I was there for quite a while before, this was 1943.

We're preparing to go overseas, of course, eventually, we ended up in convoys to Fort Dix. New Jersey, spent part of the winter in Fort Dix. Used to go into New York and see all the shows being in the service. Finally, they took, I think six of us and sent us as an advanced party to England. I was one of the six went across on the Mauritania cruise ship and landed in England.

We got there and then the rest of my outfit was to follow afterward, after we got quarters for them, get everything situated. Then they arrived in England. We stayed in England from, that was January of 1944. And we stayed in England, all of our equipment, all our guns and stuff, anti aircraft guns training. And then the personnel and guns kept come coming in and coming in until June the six is when they invaded France and my outfit got their orders, I think about June the seventh to load up on a cargo ship and go across the English channel and on the 12th of

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June, we landed on the shores of France. And I think the next day we went down to the side of the ship onto a like a big float cause they put their trucks on it and then we went ashore where everyone would drive from the float up to the water up on the beach and go ashore. This was June the 13th or the 12th, whatever it was. And of course the war had moved back inland by then.

Diane: That's quite an experience. It is. I mean, you're, you're, you're telling it to me so calmly and I'm trying to imagine what it must've been like for you in the moment.

Jim: I was 22 years old and I was still a private and the battalion Sergeant major got a bad back so he was no longer with the outfit. So they said to me, you're the new battalion sergeant major.

Diane: So that meant that you had different set of responsibilities.

Jim: Right. Once I went to work everybody had a job and we all did our job.

Diane: And when you landed, then what happened? Did you ever see any combat?

Jim: We were never on the front line. We were destined to protect the artillery and the artillery is always back here and the infantry is up here doing the dirty work. So though we were strafed by the German planes and I've been bombed, and we could hear the shells going both ways when they, when we fired our guns the shells were going that way. When they fired their guns the shells were going this way,

Diane: Pretty frightening situation to be in.

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Jim: Every day we would set up our headquarters. We stayed there until the front moved forward and we'd move up to the next place. The artillery stayed always at a certain point where the guns would shoot. So we were always with them.

Of course as we move up, of course the war has been ahead of us. So now there's still bodies there, the infantry is still just a little ways ahead. And we're either moving into a building, somebody's house. We used to sleep in barns; we used to sleep in houses. We used to, we had a pup tent that was two shelter halves.

We took the shelter half and made a bed roll out of it, had the bedding inside. So at nighttime, we would sleep no matter we were in a house or if we had a pup tent we'd sleep in the pup tent as I said, we slept in barns, whatever was available for us to get undercover. But we're behind the line so that we're not actually having anybody shooting at us.

Diane: No, but it sounds like you were in a risky situation.

Jim: Well, yeah, you had the airplanes strafing you. You already air artillery shooting at us too, but.

Diane: Yeah. Were you frightened?

Jim: We were young and young take things differently. We had a major who was probably in his thirties or so. Every time there'd be an air raid or something he'd run down cellar where we'd go out and look and see where the plane was. What we would do is watch them because whenever there was a German plane coming you could hear it because all the anti aircraft guns would be firing at him and you could see him flying across and you could see the anti aircraft fire at him, this is all, the anti aircraft is always so many rounds lighted it up, there's a name for it.

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And then the bomber was coming back, would fly back over us and we could see the ones that were damaged and the whole thing. Once in a while we'd see a dog fight.

Diane: Right.

Jim: Where there'd be two planes up there that would move across so far.

Diane: So you could watch that sometimes?

Jim: Right.

Diane: Hmm.

Jim: And we shot down a few we shot, as I said, we shot down the one thousandth German plane shot down in the war was done by my outfit.

Diane: And were you on the ground when you shot it down?

Jim: Yes, my outfit has guns on the ground that they shoot at the planes and we were shooting at low air level planes. There's another outfit shot with guns that the shell exploded a miles up in the air to get the bombers. Okay, but the fighters were down low and that's the ones we were shooting that.

Diane: Well, so you went from Omaha beach in France through Belgium.

Jim: Right.

Diane: And Germany.

Jim: And Belgium was like being in Maine with the pine trees and things that you'd think you were right back in Maine. One time we had snow in the same place. And so we went from France, from Belgium to Germany,

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and I got trench foot because they didn't bring up overshoes to the front. So with trench feet your feet turn black if it gets bad enough, but anyway, so they sent me down to a small first aid area.

It was parallel to the line we're up here, and I'm down here parallel to the line down here in a small hospital. And you lay on the bed with your feet unclothed and if you lay there long enough, it all goes away. So the whole place was just full of guys with trench foot.

Your feet get wet and damp we don't take your shoes and stocking off because if the enemy broke through you don't run around in your bare feet so you didn't want to take your shoes and stocking and that way they stayed damp.

Diane: Well, but you have had no repercussions. It hasn't come back to haunt you?

Jim: No, but there's a story that goes along with that. So they sent me all the way down parallel to the main line to a place where nothing's going on, everything, some outfit just moved in, they're new, they're not worried about them.

We're in there, all of a sudden they start coming in and tell us about that they'd seen a tiger tank here, there's gunfire going on there. So they figured we better move back. So they take everybody and put them in ambulances and they move us all the way back.

And what happened was the German army; this is the Battle of the Bulge, the big Battle of the Bulge. This is where it started, where I'm down there, where nothing's going on.

So they put us in ambulances, took us back five different ambulances and I finally get back to a hospital and stayed there about a week. And

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then I hitchhiked back to my outfit, which is on the north end of the line. So I have a, I have a beautiful thing in the, in the Center Museum that they, being in the Battle of the Bulge.

Diane: By the end of the war you were in Czechoslovakia?

Jim: Right? Mz, Mz, the Russians are coming from the other direction. That's when they met us, there, Czechoslovakia. The war was over by then. The war ended and we were in Mz, Czechoslovakia

Diane: And you were discharged in October 1945.

Jim: Right.

Diane: When you were discharged from the army, did you come back to Maine and go to college again?

Jim: Right.

Diane: Where'd you go?

Jim: I went to Northeastern Business College. Danforth and High. It was right there on the corner with the Children's Hospital and we were right next door to it. And my sister had lined me up with a nurse.

Diane: But then somebody else came along.

Jim: Well, yeah. Then after I started dating a girl that was going to college.

Diane: With you?

Jim: Me. yah.

Diane: And what was her name?

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Jim: Her name was Bettie, B E T T I E. I lived on Concord Street with my sister and she lived on Lincoln Street, I think. I used to give her a ride home.

Diane: And one thing led to another. When did you get married?

Jim: 1950.

Diane: So you were dating for a couple of years?

Jim: Yes. When I was home from the service, my mother was living with my sister in Portland, and so I lived up in the third floor with her, too. So she had us living with her and her two children and her husband working.

Diane: Well, I'm going to get back to Bettie, but I want to continue on this journey first because you've got a lot of volunteering that, you've always volunteered. Volunteering for Maine Health is not a new thing for you, my goodness. Alright, so you volunteered for the Maine National Guard. You did traffic control in Biddeford during those fires in 1947, then in 1950, you volunteered for the Civil Air Patrol and that's when you learn how to fly?

Jim: No, I didn't. No, I didn't take, I took flying lessons before that.

Diane: Okay. When did you fit that in?

Jim: Being single and doing nothing, I decided well, I'm going to learn how to fly. So I went out to Kennebunk and took flying lessons.

Diane: I think that it would be so exciting to be a pilot.

Jim: It was, and you're up there and eventually, you're all by yourself up there. At the beginning of it, you're flying with someone teaching you

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to fly. Your solo and to solo you've got to fly from here to Orono or someplace by yourself. And you come back, then somebody gives you a test. Now you have a license. Now I can fly anybody or any thing with single engine. So while I was taking my lessons and when I was taking the solo lessons I took off from Kennebunk, it's a thundershower coming up in the distance. I never should have taken off.

A thunderstorm was coming up. I'm flying around up there and I think it's getting kind of close, I better come down. Well, when you fly, you always take off into the wind, that helps the plane come up. The thunderstorm changed the direction of the wind. So now the wind's coming from this direction, and I'm trying to land the same way I took off, which was this direction. I started landing and I can't get down because it's landing down wind and I'm going fast and it was ...

Diane: You lived to tell the story.

Jim: Well, I had to come down. I know I couldn't stay up. So once I got started down, I couldn't really slow down. I just kept, it had brakes in them, there was brakes, the two wheels there. Between the brakes and having the engine shut down and the whole deal I'm flying down between the planes that were stacked like that and I finally stopped but I'm sure the instructor figured I'm going to hit those planes head on it and he's going to lose them, never mind me.

Diane: He was worried more about the planes than you.

Jim: But I should've known better because, but he should've known better going up in the thunderstorm. The wind direction does change and it changed exactly opposite the way I took off. So I'm going to land naturally. I always land the same way you take off.

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Diane: There's nothing like learning a lesson the hard way, because you certainly learned something very, very valuable. My goodness, what a harrowing tale that was.

Jim: But when you're flying small planes you fly watching the ground. There are signals that come out, you can fly on a signal, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. It shows you if you're flying left or right of it. But normally you're looking at the ground. You've already set up a course via compass so you know what your course is. So by following that course and watching the ground, you can fly anywhere. Well, we always flew to Chicago; we didn't fly a course except by the ground. There was no signal, you start with Portland and get you to Chicago. You just set it on a, on a map, you get your compass heading and fly and you're in Chicago. We used to land, Lakefront Airport in Chicago with that little plane.

Diane: No computers.

Jim: Yeah, we got there. We did that two or three times.

Diane: How many years did you fly?

Jim: Well, when I left King Cole Foods, I stopped flying because it was his airplane. So I, I must have flown from, I worked here for him 11 years. I must say I didn't fly very long, six years, maybe. The plane was there and once I left there, I didn't have any plane any longer. I had no interest to fly.

Diane: King Cole. I have to tell you that back in the day, King Cole potato chips were my absolute favorite. Seriously. They came in those big tins?

Jim: Right. So well, when I was in business college, when we were getting ready to graduate, the college usually finds you a job. And they

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came to me and wanted to know if I wanted to take a job with King Cole Foods as office manager.

I said, sure. I'm all done here. So there were two partners, there was John Hays and Norman Cole and they broke up and Norm Cole agreed not to start in business again, but he did. Anyway, so I went with King Cole, there was no office manager there at all, just me and the accounting company taught me how to be an office manager as far as the accounting went and the rest I learned just by being there. So I was the office manager for 11 years and I had a woman assistant.

Diane: And then you went where after that?

Jim: And then my wife saw an ad in the paper for Merrill Transport and she thought I should try for it because it was going to pay more money than King Cole did.

Diane: And would it be doing similar work?

Jim: They were looking for an office manager.

Diane: So you took that job?

Jim: Well, by the time I saw the ad and stuff and I decided I better apply, I went up and somebody told me there that they had been doing this for, had long lines outside the door for the day before and so I was kind of a Johnny come lately, but they took my application anyway and I talked with their accountant and I got a call that Mr. Merrill was interviewing three of the applicants so I come in and interviewed with Mr. Merrill and had a nice talk with him and went home and found out I got the job.

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Diane: Nice. And were you the office manager for the entire time you were there?

Jim: No, no. I was the office manager for two or three years and I began to do more than office work and eventually we hired an office manager and I took over as traffic manager. Eventually Mr. Merrill moved upstairs they put another story on the building. He moved upstairs and I moved into his office, with his desk and a big mirror on the wall and the whole deal.

Diane: That's pretty cool.

Jim: Then I, as the officer manager, became a vice president.

Diane: So you were a vice president of ...

Jim: Merrill Transport.

Diane: Not bad, not bad at all. And did you work there until you retired?

Jim: Yes, I retired.

Diane: You retired from Merrill Transport?

Jim: Right. I have a book here that they gave me this book that he gave me on retirement. The company put out a magazine every month and they took all the magazines, made up a book for me.

Diane: Nice.

Jim: And one of them was a write up on me.

Diane: How long had you been there?

Jim: I was with Merrill for 29 years and I retired at the age of 65, and they gave me a big retirement party. They had a big orchestra. I had a

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retirement book here, but I think my son took it. But, had a big retirement party in the Eastland Hotel.

Diane: Big deal. What year was that that you retired?

Jim: 1987.

Diane: When you retired, you were living in Biddeford?

Jim: No. I had a cottage in Biddeford.

Diane: Okay.

Jim: And, before I retired, we moved out there. The kids had all gone. One got married and Susan was in college, I think, so it was just the two of us. So we, we sold our house and moved to the cottage and winterized it and moved to Biddeford. Hills Beach

Diane: Is Hills Beach down by the college, by UNE?

Jim: Yeah. Yeah. You have to go through the college to get to my beach. You do today. You have to drive down through the campus.

Diane: Do you still have the cottage? Is it still in the family?

Jim: No. We sold the cottage to buy this.

Diane: Your kids didn't hold it against you.

Jim: No, no. They were busy with their own lives. So that was fine.

Diane: So you then sold the cottage and you bought this condo up here on the Eastern Promenade and that was in the eighties, did you tell me?

Jim: We've been here for 30 odd years now.

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Diane: And after you retired and you were living here, you both volunteered, right?

Jim: Right. At Maine Medical.

Diane: And you were telling me earlier about all the different jobs that you held — the volunteer jobs — and she did the flower box.

Jim: Yeah, she was a designer.

Diane: Well, there's a lot of things that I see that she's made here.

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Diane: All the needlework and,

Jim: Well, she and I hooked rugs. I got hooked rugs that she and I made after I retired.

Diane: So you and your wife volunteered together at Maine Medical Center?

Jim: Right.

Diane: But she got sick. She got Alzheimer's disease, right?

Jim: Yes.

Diane: Did she have it for a long time before?

Jim: Two years. One year she lived right here with me and then she fell. So we had to put her in a nursing home in Falmouth.

Diane: Sedgewood?

Jim: Sedgewood, yes.

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Diane: I'd like to talk a little bit about your wife's Alzheimer's. You told me her name was Bettie.

Jim: Right. One thing happened, before she came down with Alzheimer's she had a bleed and the blood bled across in her head. There's two parts of the brain that it hit one side, so that side of the brain was inactive. So I was taking her out to learn things all over again.

Diane: Did she have a fall or did she have a stroke?

Jim: Just bled.

Diane: How did you know that something had happened? How did she know? Did she pass out or did she suddenly,

I don't remember except she went to the hospital because of it.

It sounds like she might've had some kind of a stroke.

Well, it's not, it's not because with stroke, nothing was paralyzed. It's just her memory went. When she was living here she could do things but I was taking her to treatment things, but the first thing they had to do was teach her what a pencil was. Teach her all the stuff the brain had to learn and she had forgotten.

So it was, it sounds like it was an overnight thing almost.

Jim: It was, yeah, it just happened when that bleed happened, it happened. And this happened before the Alzheimer's..

Diane: So I was just going to ask you that.

Jim: Because she was back volunteering at the time she began to get worse, and it changed up to Alzheimer's.

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Diane: Okay. So she had the bleed, she lost her memory, but she got it back. She was able to ...

Jim: She was getting it back, was teaching her again and she was able to come back and work in the hospital.

Diane: And where were they teaching her? Do you remember? Did she actually go to like New England Rehab or someplace like that?

Jim: Yeah, there was rehab and different things.

Diane: So it worked for her for a while. She went back to volunteering, but then her memory started to deteriorate.

Jim: She wasn't doing things she should be doing right, so then we decided that something was going on.

Diane: It must've been really, really hard for you to see your wife lose her memory and to get worse.

Jim: I used to, even though she was here, living here, I used to still volunteer because I could hire somebody to come in and stay with her while I was at the hospital.

Diane: Because you need a break. It must've been such a stressful time for you.

Jim: I would see her every day, every day she was in the nursing home. I went in and see her. She knew who I was, but that's the extent of it.

Diane: Huh.

Jim: I'd stay with her for a while and I couldn't get away from her. I'd have to sneak out to get away.

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Diane: You talked about feeling lonely when we first started our conversation. That must've been really lonely for you because she'd been your partner for all those years.

Jim: Yeah. And actually she ended up with pneumonia and then she went into hospice and then when she was dying, they knew so they, they called me. And actually one of the workers from Sedgewood came in with me and we were both with her when she died. That's the hard part though. That's

Diane: How do you say goodbye?

Jim: Yeah. That's really, really hard. You never live it down, and you don't forget her and then you go on. And you just keep living your life and as I say, you just have to do things that you were doing and add to it. That's all. There's a memory there but you have to forget and be able to drop it.

Diane: Because you could drown in it. Couldn't you?

Jim: People do. I had a beautiful picture of her. I couldn't there wasn't a thing I could do to stop and see that, that didn't help me any. She was a beautiful woman. And we were the best of friends.

Diane: After your wife died, you volunteered at the nursing home that she had been in?

Jim: Yes, They were so kind to her that I said I owe you something. But I found out that some of the patients could play cards, so I used to play cards with them. One guy was a veteran and he and I were in France at the same time, but in different places and in a different outfit. , But he and I would play cards until he got to the point he couldn't play anymore. Then they set me up with another woman. I played cards with

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her for quite a while and then she got to the point she couldn't play anymore.

One more person who always played the piano and played Christmas songs. That that's all she knew, but she, so I played cards with her, and these people would beat me, I mean, as far as cards go and then they changed management, and even though they were trying to find another person for me, I could see there was no effort in it. They really weren't interested, so we parted company.

Diane: Well, so one of the keys you've given us lots of keys, a major key is to keep busy. You continue to keep busy. You continue to connect with people. Do you ever feel lonely?

Jim: No, because I started out lonely. I didn't have any family when I was growing up, I had a family around, but not, like most of us grow up with the mother and father and the whole thing. I grew up with different people. So I was never, I never lonely. I made my life as I went.

Diane: Wow. I never even thought about that. Never even thought about that. You know what it feels like to be lonely.

Jim: Well, yeah, but I never was destitute in it never let it overcome my living. I was always a happy child, see, so you can't be happy and be lonely.

Diane: Well, you do seem to have that innate personality, like we were talking about earlier optimistic. You tend to see the bright side of things. What makes it a good day for you?

Jim: I'd say the best part about volunteering is all the people that come in that house; you'd be surprised how many of them compliment me on

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my smile, on being there. It's just makes you feel good. I should be paying them.

Diane: what's been the hardest part about getting older?

Jim: The fact that you're going to die. That's a hard thing to say, isn't it? But that's, that's the hard part. It's going to end.

Diane: You enjoy life.

Jim: Yeah.

Diane: Well, tell me you can't get to 98 without having a little bit of wisdom in you, and you have shared tons of wisdom with us, but I think I'd like to leave people with your pearls. What advice would you give anybody at any age about how to live?

Jim: Well, number one, they want to live honestly, not having anything in their background that would ever come back and haunt them, which it does years later. And it's not hard to live that way, live to love your neighbor, and they're going to live to keep busy.

Diane: And that is your pearl of wisdom about living to be 98 and you're working toward 112 is to keep busy,

Jim: Right.

Diane: And in the spirit of keeping busy, as soon as I leave, you're going to hightail it. Whoops. Is that your girlfriend calling?

Jim: It may be a scam. I get quite a few of those. Bank of America. I don't have Bank of America. No, it's some deal.

Diane: Don't you hate it? I know, you just don't answer them.

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Jim: I got caught on the grandson deal, though.

Diane: You got scammed?

Jim: Yeah.

Diane: How long ago?

Jim: Last year. I was working over at Falmouth and I got so deep into it finally, they got wise that there was something was going on and they gave me instructions how to go to Wal-Mart and get the card and the whole deal. And they said we had a scam like that last week somebody got stuck. And I told him where my grandson was working they called him at his office. I found out he was all right, so we ended the whole thing right there. It sounded so real. For background they said they were from the police department. I forget what city it was in, the whole thing, and my son had been in an accident and there was DUI involved. He didn't want his father to know. So he was trying to keep it quiet, the whole, the whole story.

Diane: Wow.

Jim: And I took it hook, line, and sinker.

Diane: Well, because you let your emotions.

Jim: Right, you do. You think it's your grandson and he's in trouble and doesn't want his father to know and there's money involved and the whole deal.

Diane: How much money did they want?

Jim: They didn't want too much money, maybe \$500. It wasn't a lot of money.

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Diane: But still that's pretty elaborate for them to go through that. Yeah.

I have enjoyed talking with you so very much. Thank you for this interview. I've loved it. And as I shut the door behind me, where are you going? You and Lucy, are you going out to lunch?

Jim: We'll probably have lunch at home, we eat out twice a week and then we eat at her house.

Diane: Alright. Well, have a wonderful time.

Jim: Thank you.

Diane: This is Diane Atwood. You've been listening to my conversation about more than just aging with Jim Mardin. Thank you for listening.

This podcast was made possible by Avita of Stroudwater, a memory care community and Stroudwater Lodge, an assisted living community, both in Westbrook, Maine. You'll find out more about them@northbridgecos.com. If you enjoyed my conversation with Jim Mardin, please share it with a friend and be sure to visit my blog catching health@catchinghealth.com. Until next time may you be safe, may you be well, and may you be happy.