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Big names share big lessons on life

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Photo: Ranier Hosch

Diana Nyad

Diana Nyad is an author, journalist, motivational speaker and legendary long-distance swimmer.

In the 1970s, Diana Nyad first dreamed of becoming the first person to swim from Cuba to the U.S. without a shark cage. She tried, and failed. Thirty-two years went by and she couldn't get that quest out of her mind. At 60, she tried again and failed again—then failed in two subsequent attempts. Even those closest to her told her it might not be possible, but she refused to give up.

Finally, at 64, Nyad achieved her goal, swimming 110 miles in 53 grueling hours. "When I got out of the water, I had two messages," she recalls. "Never, ever give up, and you're never too old to chase your dreams."

"We're all living on this one-way street. When you get to the end, you want to have zero regrets. The way to do that is by realizing your age is not a limitation."



Photo Courtesy of David Hackett

David Hackett

David "Hackman" Hackett is a professional skateboarder, fine artist, graphic designer, executive life and relationship coach, drug recovery guru, motivational speaker and businessman.

After eight nominations and 50 years of skating, David Hackett was recently inducted into the Skateboarding Hall of Fame. "I'm beyond stoked," he says. "I'm humbled and honored to join the legends of our sport."

In the late 1970s, Hackett and his crew helped transform skateboarding into a worldwide sport. A pioneer of extreme skateboarding stunts, he won his first world championship at the age 15 and his most recent in his mid-50s.

"I'll never stop riding," Hackett says of his unprecedented streak of high-performance longevity.

"The moral of my story is, 'Be true to yourself.'" He adds. "Do what you love and what's in your heart. It's our responsibility as humans to get up in the morning and do what excites us. I'm gonna roll on my skateboard until I'm dead. If I die doing it, all the better. I would die doing something I truly love!"



Photo Courtesy of Margaret Trudeau

Margaret Trudeau

Margaret Trudeau is an actress, photographer, former television talk show hostess, mental health advocate, former First Lady of Canada and mother of current Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Margaret Trudeau has suffered with the stigma of mental illness for decades. "I was diagnosed more than 40 years ago with bipolar disorder and spent decades walking down the dark side of the street."

Trudeau is hardly alone. It's estimated that one in five U.S. adults has a serious mental health condition. Of that number, however, 56 percent don't seek treatment. The result is often suicide or incarceration. Suicide has surged in the past 15 years, and the rise is especially pronounced among adults age 45 to 64—up 63 percent for women and 43 percent for men.

When mental illness doesn't lead to suicide, it increasingly leads to time behind bars. Trudeau says accepting the fact that you can't save yourself from mental illness is a matter of life or death. "No matter how smart you are, how educated you are, what a wonderful family you come from, you cannot fix yourself. I tried for years and it doesn't work. It's imperative that you reach out for help."

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Photo Courtesy of Melvin Brown

Melvin Brown

Movin' Melvin Brown just may be the most interesting man in the world.

His singing and dancing skills have landed him roles in movies and created opportunities to work with legends, such as B.B. King, James Brown and Lionel Ritchie. He performed at Maya Angelou's 80th birthday celebration. He's also a tireless advocate for the homeless, particularly teens and the elderly, near his home in Austin, Texas.

Now he's found his greatest passion yet — inspiring others, especially those who think their dancing days are over, to dance their way to health.

"My energy is up. I've got unlimited potential for my life from this moment on. You've got to live in the moment," he said.

Brown travels around the world, entertaining audiences with his old-fashioned, song-and-dance shows that feature a little singing, a little dancing, a little comedy and a lot of fun. They're also an act of endurance. The 73-year-old still performs his two-hour shows without a break.

"When I get up in the morning, I celebrate that I'm alive. Everything that can happen in life happens from this moment on," he said.



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Photo: Joella Marano

Rosie Perez

Rosie Perez spent her childhood bouncing around group foster homes and dealing with her mother's schizophrenia. Despite the odds, she knew she was destined for greater things in life.

"Even as a little child, I always knew I was better than the situation I was placed in. I just needed an opportunity," she said. "I readied myself for success. I made sure my mind was sharp for any opportunity that presented itself."

That opportunity came at 19 when a "Soul Train" scout saw her dancing in a club. Even though she wasn't a professional dancer, she seized that opportunity; and before long, she was choreographing dances for "In Living Color" and music videos for the likes of Janet Jackson and Diana Ross. By 24, Spike Lee cast her in "Do the Right Thing."

Today, the Oscar-nominated actress wants other women to know not only are they, too, capable of incredible things, she wants women to celebrate their achievements.

"Women should start patting themselves on the backs, especially the ones who have overcome such great difficulties. I don't want them to shy away from their strength and their courage. I'm really proud of myself, and I want other women to feel proud, as well," Perez said.



64

Photo: Clay Patrick McBride

Rosanne Cash

Johnny Cash is one of the most iconic musicians in history, but his daughter Rosanne Cash's successful career is the result of her own talent, hard work and grit. She's a Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter with nearly a dozen No. 1 hits and is a bestselling author. Her latest album, "She Remembers Everything," features collaborations with artists, such as Kris Kristofferson, Elvis Costello and the Decemberists' Colin Meloy.

Like most of her albums over the past 25 years, it's produced by her husband and music partner John Leventhal. She says it has taken them years to learn to work together in harmony.

"John and I have worked hard at getting to a place where we don't take everything personally when we're in the studio. We work at bringing our best selves to each other and appreciate what the other one does well, which is really marriage in a nutshell," she said.

Cash has never run from the shadows of her famous father and stepmother, June Carter Cash, but she's also forged a career that is uniquely Rosanne. She says her years and experience make her feel free.

"It can take a lot of doubt and uncertainty to get to this place. I know a lot of people who are burnt out at my age, and I'm so lucky I still feel inspired. I'm still in love with my husband. I love being a mom. I love my work. And when I do feel burnt out and tired, I remind myself I'm lucky to do what I do," Cash said.

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Photo Courtesy of Miranda Penn

Cary Elwes

"As you wish!"

Those three words, uttered by lovestruck farm boy Westley in Rob Reiner's classic film, "The Princess Bride," instantly endeared actor Cary Elwes to a generation of filmgoers. More than 30 years later, Elwes is still entertaining audiences with standout roles in shows such as "Stranger Things" and the upcoming season of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel." But that doesn't mean "The Princess Bride" is ever far from his heart.

To celebrate the film's 30th anniversary, Elwes looked back on this beloved movie in his book, "As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of 'The Princess Bride.'" In it, he shared never-before-told, behind-the-scenes stories from the film, which also starred Chris Sarandon, Mandy Patinkin, Wallace Shawn, Robin Wright and Billy Crystal.

"There were no egos on this set. It was just a case of having fun. It was like theater camp, with all of us running around the English countryside dressed as pirates and princesses," Elwes said.

He said the sweet story and its lessons on the power of love are still with him today.



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Photo Courtesy of Bill Nye

Bill Nye

Bill Nye is a science educator, mechanical engineer, best-selling author and host of the Emmy-nominated Bill Nye Saves the World on Netflix.

He's also the CEO of the Planetary Society, co-founded by the late Carl Sagan, the esteemed astronomer and Nye's former professor at Cornell University.

Nye is now inspiring people of all ages to open their minds to the wonders of science. He's taking on such topics as evolution, climate change and the possibility of time travel.

He feels a sense of urgency to educate the public. "I direct my energies to work on TV to engage people to save the world," he says. "The world will be here no matter what we do. But I want to save the world for humankind."

Lately, Nye says he's been thinking about thought leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and the Age of Enlightenment.

"We want people to grasp and embrace the process of science," he says. "We use critical thinking to understand the world. The enlightenment guys were into designing a government based on the same ideas. We're living in a time right now when the ideas of enlightenment are being set aside. But I believe they'll bounce back very soon, because you can't compete economically if you deny science and the process by which we know nature and our place in it."



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Photo: Theo Wargo/Staff

Marion Ross

Marion Ross played the matriarch of the Cunningham family on the beloved TV show Happy Days. The show made her a superstar forever.

Yet it didn't protect her from second-guessing her career, her marriage and her purpose. She reveals it all in her new memoir, My Days: Happy and Otherwise. Following a divorce at age 40, Ross says she wondered how she'd survive as a newly single mom, let alone find success in life: "I couldn't get a job. I couldn't believe I'd hit the wall. I had to rent out a room in my house. I had to crawl back out."

Ross began by crawling but eventually soared by working tirelessly and drawing upon every connection she had or could make. She says she considered quitting acting and becoming a teacher, but her mother encouraged her to keep pursuing her dreams.

"My mother was a very positive, strong woman," Ross says. "I was raised on 'You can be anything.' When you're raised with high expectations and great hope, you can keep those feelings through life."

Ross's big break finally came at age 50 when she landed what was supposed to be a small role, that of Marion Cunningham on Happy Days. By the end of its 11-year run, she was firmly and forever established as America's mom.

"I'm very optimistic," says Ross. "I always look on the bright side. Even these days, although I've officially retired from acting, I stay active, engaged and constantly ask myself: 'How can we make something better out of this?'"



Photo: Emma McIntyre/Staff

Louie Anderson

Louie Anderson is one of the most versatile and successful comedians of our time. From the moment when Johnny Carson first introduced him to a national audience in 1984 to his time as host of “Family Feud” to selling out comedy clubs across the country, he gained millions of fans.

Despite earning three Emmys, Anderson’s latest television role has earned him some of the highest acclaim of his career. On the hit FX series “Baskets,” he plays Christine, the matriarch of a family that includes twins, both played by Zach Galifianakis. Anderson said it’s a role that allows him to channel and honor the memory of his late mother.

“When producers asked me to play the role of a woman, I immediately jumped at the chance. I didn’t have any question over whether I could do it or not because I’m so full of myself!” he said, laughing. “I feel so fortunate to have such a beautiful part to play in the third act of my career. My mom was such a huge influence on me, so I play the character as if I was a mom. I try to make Louie Anderson disappear in the part.”

“I’m proud to be 66. Age really is a state of mind. I’ve never thought your age defines you; I think it’s your mind, spirit and soul that define you,” he said.



Photo: Allen Berezovsky/Stringer

Oscar Robertson

During his legendary 14-year career in the NBA, Oscar “The Big O” Robertson set the gold standard for what it means to be an all-around player.

Whether he was scoring, assisting or picking up rebounds, he was the ultimate team player. Now, the NBA Hall-of-Famer wants to be on your team. Diagnosed at the age of 72 with Stage III prostate cancer, Robertson opted to have his entire prostate removed via robotic surgery. Then he decided to go public with his story. In the years since his retirement, Robertson had been a fiercely private person. What compelled him to share such personal news?

“Some things you don’t keep a secret,” he says. “At first, I wanted to keep the fact that I’d had my prostate removed a secret. But then I realized that was the wrong direction.”

One in six men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, Robertson notes: “My message? Go get your prostate checked so you’re not asking, ‘Why me?’ There’s a way out if you deal with the issue in time.”

Robertson didn’t just go public. He lent his star power to the International Prostate Cancer Foundation in Orlando, Florida, and partnered with his surgeon, Vipul Patel, M.D., to urge other men to get tested.

Although Robertson’s playing days are behind him, he’s not interested in sitting on the bench.

“I don’t want to retire,” he says. “I think everyone should have things to do, things to get up for, things to talk about. I don’t mind golf, but I wouldn’t want to play it all the time. If there’s something I can do that I enjoy and that helps people, then that’s how I want to spend my time.”



Photo: Theo Wargo/Staff

Aaron Neville

Aaron Neville’s voice has been an unmistakable part of the American music scene since the 1960s. Throughout his long and legendary career, he’s scored four platinum albums and four Top 10 hits, including three No. 1 hits, “Tell It Like It Is,” “Everybody Plays the Fool” and “Don’t Know Much” with Linda Ronstadt. His voice conveys wisdom, experience and lessons learned. One of the hardest lessons to learn was how to live without his beloved wife Joel by his side. She died in 2008 following a three-year battle against lung cancer.

“After Joel died, I didn’t know if I’d go on,” Neville said. “I had been with her since we were 16, and I buried her on our 48th anniversary. She was my everything.”

A few years later, he unexpectedly found love again with photographer Sarah Friedman, whom he met on a “People” magazine photoshoot.

“Sarah encouraged me to talk about Joel, and it helped to get some of the sadness out of me. Meeting her taught me that life goes on and it can get better. Before her, I felt like there was no tomorrow; but here I am, years later, happy and alive,” he said. Today, he and Sarah are married, he’s touring the country and creating new music.

“I’m 78 and doing what I love. In life, you’re born and you die, but it’s what you do in between that counts,” he said. “Don’t make it a blank trip. Reach out and do things for other people.”



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Photo: Kevork Djanssezian / Stringer

Judy Collins

Chances are, when you think of Judy Collins, you think of her legendary music career, but hers is also a story of compassion, overcoming obstacles and surviving and thriving.

"I know how it feels to be overwhelmed by life. I've suffered from polio, tuberculosis, bulimia, depression and alcoholism. I've been sober for more than 40 years. I've had vocal cord surgery, which left me afraid that I might never sing again. And most devastating of all was the loss of my son to suicide," she said.

Collins is also a prolific writer, and she has several reasons for writing so candidly about her struggles.

"One of the reasons I've written books on some of the most personal and painful parts of my life is that I believe I get the benefit of healing by sharing. Second, it connects me with other people who have struggled with the same issues. Third, I want to reach out to others who are struggling to let them know they're not alone."

Her willingness to share her pain so that others don't feel alone recently earned her the Erasing the Stigma Leadership Award for bringing awareness about suicide and mental illness.

"If I can pass on a bit of wisdom it would be this: Never say never," she said. "Never give up, never surrender, keep doing what you love and always remember to find a way to serve others."



86

Photo: Handout / Handout

Carol Burnett

Carol Burnett is a comedy pioneer and inspiration. Her sketch comedy show debuted in 1967 and ran for 11 seasons. Now 86, she's touring the country, playing to sell-out crowds; and she was recently saluted at the Golden Globes Awards with the inaugural Carol Burnett Award, which will be given annually to honor lifetime achievements in television. She says her secret to success and longevity is staying busy.

"When you're engaged with life, it keeps you going. Last year, I did 20 appearances as part of my Q&A tour. It's just me and a few clips, and I field questions from the audience. It keeps the old gray matter ticking because I have to be on my toes. I have to be in the present, and I think that's healthy," she said.

She says throughout her life, she's experienced the highest of highs and lowest of lows, especially losing her 38-year-old daughter to cancer. She says even though she'll never get over losing her daughter, she learned an important lesson.

"I'm grateful for the time I had with her. I wouldn't trade that for the world. She's with me every day, and I welcome that. You just have to take life one day at a time. Appreciate each and every day because you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. It's a waste of time to fret over it. Good things happen, bad things happen. That's life. You have to accept that and get on with it."



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Photo Courtesy of Ernie Hudson

Ernie Hudson

Ernie Hudson rose to fame in *Ghostbusters* in 1984 and all these years later, he's in greater demand than ever, with stand-out performances in hit shows like *Blue Bloods* and *Grace and Frankie*. Ernie Hudson learned at an early age that his choices, not his circumstances, would define his future.

By 18, he was working as a janitor and had a new wife, with a baby on the way, but he still had a dream – to act.

"I never imagined not working as an actor. I've always loved it," he says. "I can look at my career and I could get frustrated thinking of guys who have gone on to do bigger things, but the more I focus on that, the worse I feel. I'd much rather focus on the things I have, and I have so much to be thankful for."

He says his grandmother taught him when you make a choice to do something, the universe will support you.

"Even when you're going through something very difficult, don't accept it as if it's out of your control," he says. "As long as you know your future is in your hands and you can make another choice, the universe will make that choice with you."



Photo: Kwaku Alston

Maria Shriver

Award-winning journalist Maria Shriver is also an advocate for caregivers; a mother to four and the author of six bestsellers, including her latest, *I've Been Thinking: Reflections, Prayers and Meditations for a Meaningful Life*.

Shriver is a self-admitted over-thinker. These days, she's been thinking a lot about one question she keeps hearing over and over again from people around the country – what is our purpose?

"It doesn't matter if you're 20 or 60 or beyond, we all seem to be in a questioning phase," she says. "We're all seeking answers. You can fall into a fearful phase or, my hope is, you could fall into a 'Wow, this is exciting, this is an opportunity' phase."

Shriver encourages more of us to keep dreaming about and remain optimistic about our futures.

"I feel more alive today than I did in my 20s," she says. "I have so many things I want to do still and I'm feeling engaged, passionate and committed to causes like finding a cure for Alzheimer's. Dreams are for all of us and they don't end in your 20s and 30s."

Lea Thompson

Back to the Future and Caroline in the City actress Lea Thompson's new project is a true family affair. She recently collaborated with her two daughters and husband on a new film called *The Year of Spectacular Men*.

If you're going to take a scary leap of faith with your career, why not do it with those you trust most? "It's been a really loving, handmade, personal, grassroots project, for sure," Lea Thompson says.

She set the idea in motion when she suggested her daughter, Madelyn, who was struggling through a terrible year, write out her feelings in a script.

Thompson loved the result so much, she took it on as her first feature-film directing project. Since the budget was small, Madelyn, a singer/songwriter, also starred in and scored the film and her sister Zoey (*Why Him?*, *The Disaster Artist*) played her on-screen sister. Thompson's husband Howard pitched in with producing duties.

"You watch your kids go through these difficult things, and you want to protect them but you can't. Life is messy and full of mistakes, so some of that was hard to read," Thompson says. "I'm so happy to be part of the story written by a young woman for young women."

All the words that I ever spoke when I was an ingenue were written by men. I was made to play their idea of what the perfect girl was so many times. To be able to tell this story and all its messiness was particularly gratifying for me."



Photo: Russell Baer

Scott Hamilton

Scott Hamilton has faced Stage 4 testicular cancer and three brain tumors. The Olympic gold medalist, broadcaster, father and author of *Finish First* says that despite it all, he remains an eternal optimist.

Life has never come easy to Hamilton. He was adopted at the age of 2 and at 8, he was misdiagnosed and told that he had just six months to live.

At the height of his ice skating career, his height was only 5-foot-2-inch and figure skating was more expensive than his family could afford. After years of underachieving, his mother passed away and he asked himself: "What had she sacrificed so much for?"

So, Hamilton got serious. He got competitive—something he thinks is sorely lacking in our participation trophy world these days.

"I ask my kids all the time: 'What's your greatest strength?' And they answer me back: 'Lack of weakness.' If we can find our weak parts and strengthen those, we're going to be OK," he says. "Figure out what's held you back and chip away at those things that prevent you from moving forward."

Hamilton says there are no such things as overnight fixes—but if you keep showing up every day and outwork everybody, there's nothing at which you can't be successful.



Photo Courtesy of Scott Hamilton



84

Photo: Dewey Nicks

Herb Alpert

Herb Alpert has always marched to the beat of his own horn. That can be a lonely journey for a musician; but for Alpert, it led him into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and earned him nine Grammy Awards and 29 gold and platinum albums. He sold 72 million records.

Risk also played a key role in his career. In 1962, after losing faith in record labels, Alpert formed A&M records with Jerry Moss. A&M began in Alpert's garage, only to become one of the most successful artist-owned companies ever created.

By 1966, Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass were outselling the Beatles. Meanwhile, at A&M Records, Alpert personally launched the careers of The Carpenters, Liza Minelli and Janet Jackson. The most important lesson he's learned is to spend your time doing what you truly love.

"I'm having as much fun playing now as I did at any time in my career," Alpert said. "I just love to make music."

The musician, sculptor and painter also believes the challenge of artistic expression keeps him mentally sharp and excited about the future.

"I don't really feel old or young," he said. "We're all striving to live in the moment, and that's a great place to be."

Dr. Joycelyn Elders

Dr. Joycelyn Elders is one of the most controversial surgeon generals in U.S. history; and at 86 years old, she is still speaking her mind.

Elders made history as the first African-American and the second woman to be appointed U.S. surgeon general. She is a pediatric endocrinologist who has spent decades speaking about the importance of sex education for teens and advocating for the legalization of marijuana.

She says she's just as outspoken and passionate as she's always been; but these days, she's focused on the state of aging in America.

"We don't do it as well as we could," she said. "Even as more and more of us grow older, our infrastructure is not set up to accommodate us. It's set up to keep us isolated in our children's home. They feel an obligation to take care of us, but we don't always want to be there, either."

That's why in her late 80s, she continues to fly to events around the country, making speeches and working tirelessly on policy change. Elders says she's ready for someone else to take over the cause, but she won't give up.



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Photo Courtesy of Dr. Joycelyn Elders

John Corbett

The path to stardom isn't easy nor is it typically direct. In the case of actor John Corbett, it was meandering, to say the least. Before landing his breakout role on the beloved show, "Northern Exposure," at the age of 31, Corbett was a steelworker, a hairdresser and a country singer.

That big break led to his first Emmy Award and the beginning of a long and successful career. He's since charmed audiences in projects such as "Sex and the City," "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" and now the hit young-adult Netflix series, "To All the Boys I Loved Before."

"My career hasn't always been easy," Corbett said. "It's cold out there! Thankfully, I've always been able to jump from one lily pad to the next. Just as it's about to sink, another one comes by. People pay me to do this, and this is kind of a dream come true, really."

Another dream come true is his 18-year-long relationship with the iconic Bo Derek.

"She's the love of my life and a fantastic partner in life," he said.

Now 58, the actor is loving his career and loving life itself.

"I've learned that none of it really matters," Corbett said. Try to enjoy every day to its fullest. You never know if the sun is going to rise tomorrow, so just enjoy it, man!"



58

Photo: JC Olivera / Stringer



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Photo Courtesy of Janice Lennard

Janice Lennard

Janice Lennard is the poster child for the benefits of staying active as we age. She has been involved with ballet, yoga and Pilates for more than 65 years.

The 77-year-old teaches yoga classes at Rancho Mirage in California and stars in a series of at-home yoga, ballet barre and Pilates workout DVDs, inspiring men and women around the world with her style and technique and with her graceful attitude on aging.

“As you age, you tend to accept things that happen and let them slide off your back instead of dwelling on negative things,” she said. “You take all the good things because you’re still here, still breathing, still able to move and still enjoying every day.”

Lennard says she wants everyone to know it’s never too late to start moving. Even a total hip replacement surgery a few years ago wasn’t enough to sideline her commitment to fitness.

“I’m feeling great,” she said. “Sure, I’ve had aches and pains just like everyone else; but it goes back to attitude again. I tend to just go with it. I still keep moving and relaxing with the pain and it just works for me. I know it can work for you, too.”



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Photo: Jared Wickerham

Darlene Love

“Rolling Stone” called Darlene Love one of the greatest singers of all time. Yet, for most of her career, few knew her name because she was a backing vocalist.

Love sang with artists such as Elvis Presley, Tom Jones, Dionne Warwick and Sam Cooke, as well as several of Phil Spector’s famous girl groups of the 1960s, including the Crystals, Bob B. Soxx and the Blue Jeans.

Eventually, she finally got her turn in the spotlight. In 2011, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and in 2013, her career and talents were highlighted in the Oscar-winning documentary “Twenty Feet from Stardom.”

“Life is not as hard or complicated as it was 30 or 40 years ago,” Love said. “It’s all about me sticking to my career, making that 20-foot march from backup singer to the front and my eye is on the prize. This can be done by anybody at any age.”

She calls this era the best time of her life.

“All of the worries and cares that you have as a young adult or when you’re raising your children are gone. I have a fabulous marriage; I’ve been married for 36 years. I work out every morning at 5 a.m. Life is good.”



81

Photo: Larry Busacca

Gordon Lightfoot

In his more than 50 years in the music business, singer-songwriter Gordon Lightfoot has gifted us with some extraordinary songs, including classics, such as “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,” “Sundown” and “If You Could Read My Mind.”

His songs have been recorded by everyone from Elvis Presley to Jane’s Addiction. He’s nothing short of a legend. Another legend, Bob Dylan, considers him his mentor.

“I guess you could say we’re each other’s mentors,” Lightfoot said. “I’ve known him his entire career; and without having met Bob, I never would have written ‘Early Morning Rain.’”

Lightfoot also says he doesn’t think he would still be touring and making music today, if he hadn’t overcome his alcohol dependency in 1982. He credits his exercise regime with helping to stay sober. His healthy lifestyle also helped him survive and thrive in the aftermath of two major health events — an aortic aneurysm in 2002 and a stroke in 2006.

“It was a scary time after that stroke. It took me six months to get everything back into working order,” he said. “Thankfully, since I was in good condition, I never even missed a show.”

He says his favorite piece of advice is obvious but so important: stay motivated.



Photo Courtesy of Sonia Warshawski

Sonia Warshawski

Sonia Warshawski is one of the last living survivors of the Holocaust. As a teen, she survived three, different concentration camps; and on the day she was liberated, she was accidentally shot in the chest.

After recovering, she moved to the United States, where she married a tailor and had three children. For decades, she didn't talk about her Holocaust experiences; but in her 70s, when she saw hate crimes and violence still remained serious issues, she started speaking to schools, churches, prisons and juvenile detention centers. Her story inspired the documentary, "Big Sonia."

"I lived with my memories of the Holocaust all my life. When I came out of that hell, I couldn't talk about it. I was very naive," she said. "I thought people wouldn't hate each other anymore. Don't forget: Germany and Austria had some of the highest cultures before the war, but this all happened through propaganda. If it could happen there, it could happen again."

Warshawski says even though hate keeps repeating itself, it's never too late to break the cycle. "Hate has to be taken out of people's hearts," she said.



Photo: Frazer Harrison

Ken Jeong

Ken Jeong always wanted to be a comedian; but he focused on his studies, and it paid off. He graduated from high school at the age of 16 and headed off to college, then medical school, but his dream never died.

After a few years practicing medicine, he decided to go for it.

"I had no idea if I could have a career in comedy," Jeong said. "I was very scared and for good reason. I was leaving behind a stable career where I could make six figures for the rest of my life. But this was something that I had to do."

His passion and persistence paid off. He's since had standout roles in films such as "The Hangover," "Knocked Up" and "Crazy Rich Asians," as well as on the beloved TV show "Community." He also created, produced, wrote, directed and starred in his own ABC series, "Dr. Ken."

His message? Believe in yourself.

"I think timing and passion are the key to everything, and I was blessed to have both at the right time," he said. "I also believe I can make mistakes and make adjustments based on those mistakes. Don't be afraid to fail and don't be afraid to succeed."



Photo: Michael Loccisano / Staff

Marlo Thomas

Marlo Thomas went from being a household name, and an award-winning star of her groundbreaking TV show, to becoming one of the driving forces behind St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Over her legendary career, she's earned four Emmys, a Golden Globe and a Grammy. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Thomas has made a career out of trying new things, something she says is vital to growth, no matter your age.

"Everywhere I go, I meet women who say to me, 'It's too late isn't it?' And I say, 'Of course it isn't! If you're 40, 50 or 60, you could have 50, 40 or 30 years left. That's a lot of time to do a lot of things and make a lot of dreams come true.'"

One way she reinvented herself is by becoming an author. She's now penned seven bestsellers, including "It Ain't Over... Till It's Over: Reinventing Your Life — and Realizing Your Dreams — Anytime, At Any Age." In it, she profiles 60 women who share their stories of starting over.

"I wrote this book because I want to encourage people that, 'Yes, you can start over at any age.' Dream big but start small. I think a lot of people get daunted, but if you just do one thing every day, you will get there."



Photo: Kevon Stover

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King Errisson

King Errisson went from the depths of poverty in his native Bahamas to being considered one of the greatest percussionists in the world.

“One night, I was doing a drum solo at the Conch Shell Club in the Bahamas, when Sean Connery and his crew from ‘Thunderball’ walked in and ‘discovered me,’” Errisson told Growing Bolder. “They ended up writing a part for me in the movie, and everything just broke loose. You can never tell where success is going to come from.”

Errisson said once he took that chance, the phone started ringing and never stopped. As a kid, he played whatever he could get his hands on – coffee cans, buckets or bottles. By his mid-20s, he was in the recording studio with legends like Smokey Robinson, The Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross and The Four Tops. Berry Gordy called him the “unsung hero of Motown.” Errisson also toured with Neil Diamond for more than 40 years.

“Always be ready for that opportunity when it knocks at your door. A lot of people had the opportunities I had but didn’t take the jump. And their life didn’t expand. Mine did because I wasn’t afraid to try. Once I left the nest behind and branched off into the world, nothing was going to stop me from my journey.”



Photo: Rick Diamond / Staff

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Charlie Daniels

Charlie Daniels has created hits on the rock, country, pop and Christian charts. He’s won virtually every music industry award and accolade in multiple genres. His signature hit, “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” is among the most celebrated songs in the history of American music.

Despite his many accomplishments, he’s always striving to be better.

“I have a group of players with me and every one of them is a better musician than me,” he said. “And every night when we get on stage, I just have to really scuffle to keep up with these guys. It’s good for me physically and it’s good for me mentally. It’s a great way to live.”

Daniels still plays more than 100 cities every year, and he’s passionate about making a difference in the lives of others. He’s the founder of the The Journey Home Project, which supports U.S. military veterans. He says continuing to perform music and give back keeps him engaged and passionate about life.

“There’s very little we can do about our bodies aging, other than taking care of them, which I do. I think you have to keep your mind occupied with something new, fresh and challenging all the time, which I do, too. I am here to tell anybody: Don’t give up on your dreams just because you turn a certain age.”



Photo: Cameron Spencer / Staff

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Julie Andrews

Julie Andrews is one of the most beloved movie musical stars of all time. She’s best-remembered for classics, such as “Mary Poppins,” “The Sound of Music,” “Victor Victoria” and “The Princess Diaries.” When her famous voice was silenced after a failed surgery, many wondered what she would do next. “I’m not singing these days, and I miss it very much,” she said. “I had an operation that unfortunately made it impossible for me to continue my career, but I’ve just found a different way of using my voice.”

She’s found a compelling way to combine her acting and musical talents to keep the art of storytelling alive through children’s books. Over the past 15 years, she’s collaborated with her daughter Emma Walton Hamilton on 32 books, including the “Very Fairy Princess” series for young children and their latest, “Home Work,” a memoir about Andrews’ years in Hollywood.

After discovering her love of writing more than 40 years ago, Andrews says she now realizes writing is her life’s great passion; and it’s a learning curve that never stops.

“I think one should always look for other opportunities to grow, because it’s all about learning more and more about a craft you love doing.”

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Photo: Laura Marie Duncan

Chita Rivera

Chita Rivera is a national treasure. After more than 65 years in show business, this musical theater goddess is still going strong.

She's a force of nature who originated some of the most iconic roles in Broadway history, including Rose in *Bye Bye Birdie*, Velma in *Chicago*, and, perhaps her most beloved role, Anita in *West Side Story*.

Since making her Broadway debut in 1951 at the age of 18, she's come to represent the very best of the Great White Way. The 10-time Tony Award nominee (and two-time winner) is the first Latina to receive a Kennedy Center Honor. In 2009, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Just before her 84th birthday, Rivera added another major achievement — headlining her Carnegie Hall solo debut. Says Rivera of the experience: "The old saying goes, 'How do you get to Carnegie Hall?' 'You practice.' Well, I had a lot of time to practice for my first show at Carnegie Hall!"

Rivera adds that one of the keys to her longevity is surrounding herself with people and experiences she loves. That's why she's still touring the world, performing songs from some of her most memorable theatrical runs.

"I've been so inspired by so many people," she says. "They've made me what I am today. I hope I can do the same thing for young dancers and young actors. I'd also love to inspire older people who think their lives are over and that they can't do anything anymore. Of course you can! You just have to share it, care about it and do it."



Photo Courtesy of Debra Winger

Debra Winger

Debra Winger is a three-time Academy Award-nominated actress best known for roles in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Urban Cowboy*, *Terms of Endearment* and *Shadowlands*.

Debra Winger walked away from Hollywood at 40, taking a six-year hiatus to focus on her family. Her career has heated back up with roles in TV and film including 2017's *The Lovers*, a poignant comedy that explores a longtime marriage turned sour.

"Relationships have to continuously evolve and go through countless iterations to survive," she says. "We're all on the same quest, trying to stay invigorated."

Winger has never enjoyed celebrity and didn't miss Hollywood. But she did miss the challenge and stimulation of acting and made the decision to re-engage on her own terms.

"We can't be afraid to take chances as we age," she says. "Fear is what keeps us from moving forward in life and leads to unhappiness. Life is about finding our groove, no matter our age. So, don't let fear or lack of interest stunt your personal growth or sabotage your relationship."

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