

Rebellious Wellness ^{over} 50

Leslie Gold



Episode 39: Stories From the Eldest Among Us, You Are Never Too Old to... with Leslie Gold

[00:00:00] Welcome back everybody to another episode of the rebellious wellness over 50 podcast. I'm super excited today, because guess what? We're going to talk about getting older. We seem to dance around it and talk about the symptoms and the causes of things and how to avoid them and how to get better at them.

[00:00:16] But today we're going to talk about...the beauty that is getting older. My guest is Leslie Gold she has a history in broadcast journalism and telling stories. And I'll let her tell you about that. But first, welcome, Leslie. Thank you for being here.

[00:00:32] **Leslie Gold:** Gregory, thank you so much for having me, it's great to be here.

[00:00:35] **Gregory Anne:** Yeah, I'm so excited because you are. You said that what you learned from your podcast was a paradigm shift. So that was about listening to people that are older seventies, eighties, nineties, in their hundreds. First give the reader, the listeners, a little bit of background about how you came here.

And then we'll talk about how those stories changed your life.

Leslie Gold: Well, I'll start when I became a radio talk show host in the late nineties. Before that I had been an entrepreneur. So I was a talk show host and broadcaster in New York city for about 15 years. And I was known as the Radio Chic.

Gregory Anne: Such a great name.

Thank you.

Leslie Gold: Um, and built up to about 1 million daily listeners. Then I stopped in 2017 and turned my attention to some other interests and business ventures that I had. And with the 2020 pandemic shift, I had a hankering to connect to people. Like everybody. I felt isolated and I had been asked to do a podcast many times based on my radio show, which was largely, to be honest with you Gregory was largely about me and kind of tasteless, and I've never wanted to do a podcast in that regard. It always felt like a vanity project and it always felt lame.

I wanted to connect to people. So I decided to speak to older folks, 80, 90, a hundred years old or older living extraordinary lives. Had lived through something extraordinary in their life or were still doing something extraordinary with their life. And I called the series. I do call the series A Life's Story, has two S's in the middle.

[00:02:25] L I F E S S T O R Y and how I came to you is as I put out each episode, I realized that every one of these stories, although not meant to do this. As people were telling their life's story, each of them pushed back on the preconceived notions that we have about aging. If you ask the average person to describe what do they think their life is going to be like when they turn 90 or a hundred years old?

[00:02:53] If they're lucky enough to get there, you'll hear words like feeble or frail, or needy or ugly or lonely, right? This is what we largely think is coming for us. But after I got it to about seven or eight episodes into the season of A Life's Story, I realized that's not what I'm finding at all, actually. The reason that I reached out to you is because you believe it's time to bust the myth that aging equals decline. And these folks that I speak to bear that out completely, and I'll mention one other thing. In my broadcast career, I've interviewed three presidents, countless celebrities, Newsmakers, business people, politicians of all stripes.

None of them has been as interesting as the people I'm speaking to in a life's story.

Gregory Anne: I'll bet. Well people's lives are so interesting even when we don't think we are. You know how it is when you meet somebody at a networking event or a cocktail party. And they say, so tell us a little bit about yourself and you can see people really tune in.

I would imagine as a person who had been in broadcast journalism for so long, getting those, the right questions to get those threads of gold to come forward.

Leslie Gold: That's right.

And again, I just meant to be a storyteller for these folks, but they ended up being very educational and instructive for me. They caused a paradigm shift for me on how I think about myself getting older and what's in store.

I could highlight a couple for you, I think might be illustrative if that's all right.

Gregory Anne: Yes. Please highlight some stories.

[00:04:36] **Leslie Gold:** Okay. So I'll start with actually our last episode of season one, which is Beverly Schottenstein and Beverly Schottenstein pushes back, I would say on the word feeble.

So Beverly is 94 and she's a lady of means she's not financially sophisticated. Her husband earned the money. He had earned the money 30 years ago and he and his brother built the Schottenstein retail empire, which today Gregory is a behemoth. It owns things like DSW shoes, Big Lots stores, American Eagle Outfitters, 600 Albertson stores.

Yeah, there are billions that, well, when they were in the hundreds of millions, that's when her husband and his brother were building the company and he, her husband died young. Beverly was left with his money and in recent years, Beverly was defrauded, swindled. Gaslighted by her money managers at JP Morgan, they put her in inappropriate investments.

They churned her account. They skimmed money out of it for themselves, but here's the twist. The money managers were her adult grandsons. Oh, and as Beverly again, not as financially sophisticated later, but as she began to question, why am I not getting statements anymore, boys? It's because they stopped it.

[00:06:02] They would tell her things like she was getting dementia and she had okayed everything that they were doing. Now Beverly does not have dementia. I spoke to her for quite some time. So, it struck me as particularly cruel that not only they would tell their grandma she had dementia, but they told all her neighbors that she had dementia too.

And not to pay attention to, to her. Now, Beverly is not a fighter by nature. She's a nice lady. And she didn't come from money either. She just married the right guy in that regard. And as I say, she was not fluent at all in complicated financial dealings. But what she did know is right from wrong and she knew this was wrong.

[00:06:44] So she fought back at 94. She took everyone to court, including JP Morgan, which is the country's biggest bank by all accounts. She was in over her head. She won.

Gregory Anne: Wow!

[00:07:00] **Leslie Gold:** The lesson to me from Beverly's story was that you can be forceful at any age. Beverly testified in front of a sophisticated financial court for 11 hours.

Leslie Gold: Even though she's not a lady that understands the machinations of wall street, and in that she proved a couple of things, uh, that you can be forceful at any age.

She proved that she didn't have dementia as her grandsons had alleged. And also she had taken on this fight with the help of her caregiver who noticed something was really weird with this family and was the first one to ring the alarm bell and a granddaughter. And it also showed me that if you're fighting the good fight, you can collect allies at any age to help you.

\ You're not alone.

[00:07:51] **Gregory Anne:** Mm, I love that. And I often hear from doctors and other people in the world of healthy aging, the importance of community and people who have your back, that you can trust and rely on. So that clearly is true at any age. And I believe we have to work at it. Some people will just naturally step back from social engagements.

[00:08:15] They don't want to go play bridge anymore. You find yourself, especially during COVID. It was very hard for people to stay in touch, except for things like zoom and you know, the phone. But it's so important to do that. Like, you felt a natural inclination to connect. I have a circle of friends that we only used to see each other a couple of times a year

and we started a zoom call every week. We wanted that connection and we were all scared in the early days, you know. But to take that on, she must've had a good amount of chutzpah throughout her life, even though it sounds mild.

[00:08:46] **Leslie Gold:** She was mild mannered but in the end she got \$19 million back.

Well, well, worth it, right? Half from JP Morgan and half from her miserable grandsons.

[00:08:57] **Gregory Anne:** Dear me. That is some story.

[00:08:59] **Leslie Gold:** Yeah. So she's great. So that was a lesson for me. You talked about, the importance of social engagement and it actually reminded me of another one. You can stop me by the way, Gregory at anytime.

Cause I can talk endlessly about these people. I love them so much. I fall a little bit in love with all of these older people that I interview, but I want to tell you about, Eleanor Pendergraph. If I can. 88 year old Eleanor Pendergraph is a tough, tough old Southern lady. She has MS. Over the years, she deteriorated to the point that she was completely debilitated in a wheelchair.

She was misdiagnosed for many years, told she had something else, but it turned out to be MS and her doctors told her, finally, “you have MS, you're getting worse and you're never going to get any better.” And she said, *you're wrong*. Out loud and to herself. And she was in her seventies at this point and she dragged herself into the gym.

[00:10:06] And when I say dragged, she was wheeling herself in with a wheelchair or, dragging a foot behind her with a walker. And she went to a silver sneakers class day one. She could only sit in a chair and lift one foot. And an inch and a half on the ground and put it down. She went six days a week. And over time she progressed from the wheelchair back to the walker, back to two canes and back to one cane.

[00:10:39] She made a point of telling me this, that she would go to the gym and people would, strangers would give her a thumbs up or come over and say, oh, you're doing great Eleanor. The day one silver sneakers instructor who we found and spoke to said, “this is terrible to say, but I thought, please don't come into my class because I can't, I can't help this lady.”

She didn't look like she belonged in a gym. She looked like she belonged in a long-term care facility, but this community of strangers who gave her an attaboy every now and then or told her she was doing great really spurred her on. I won't give away everything.

But the end of the episode is she became a medal winner in the national senior games for running. And she regularly runs 5k races.

Gregory Anne: Oh my gosh. That is a great story.

[00:11:34] **Leslie Gold:** Completely turned around her life. She completely turned around her, her physical situation, but she elevated her entire life in the process.

That community was important, but speaking to Eleanor, I said, what's your message for the rest of us? And she said, “you can always do something.”

Gregory Anne: That is so true.

[00:11:56] **Leslie Gold:** Right? You can always do something. And in Eleanor's case, the something she did day one was lift a foot, an inch and a half off the ground.

That's it. And I love her story too.

[00:12:07] **Gregory Anne:** Yes. And it just reminds me that no, nothing is too small to start. Right. We sometimes talk ourselves out of things at any age, because we think we're never going to be able to do *that*. But if your whole life has been reduced to a wheelchair and probably full-time care and I like what that doctor said was like, poking the bear, poking Eleanor's bear.

You're never going to do X, Y, and Z again. Oh really? Just watch me.

[00:12:34] **Leslie Gold:** That's right. But even if you're not completely debilitated, right. We all have aches and pains. Our back hurts. Again, I think of her. What if I get up in the morning and I'm a little creakier than I should be? I think, well, I could do something to fix that.

Eleanor told me that I could do something and her life proves it.

[00:12:52] **Gregory Anne:** Every time you interview somebody, you get a little thing to put in your backpack of aging as you're going through your next, you know, 10, 20, 30 years, whatever you have. It seems like you're getting a little gem of motivation or inspiration for your own journey.

Leslie Gold: So that's true it really is. I learned a lot about, how people avoid loneliness at old age and how important that it is.

Gregory Anne: Tell us about that. Tell us some of the wisdom you've gotten.

[00:13:18] **Leslie Gold:** Well, that's David LeDuc. That lesson came from him. He's 91 and he had a big, big life in the early years.

He was first the Navy officer, then a ballet dancer, then the crew, then the creative director for Revlon for in the mad men years, right in the sixties and seventies. And he did commercials, every iconic Revlon commercial that we can think of. As David in retirement, he has written 45 books.

Got them all published. None of them self-published. Yeah. So, he's still very busy, but he's also got a lovely group of friends that he socializes with regularly, they're mostly younger than he is as they would be at 91. He had his 91st birthday and he rode in on a bicycle and he was wearing all white and he had white gloves and a white scarf flying behind him, made a big entrance.

[00:14:20] And as we were talking, David challenged my thinking in saying,, “Why can't your last 30 years be your best?” And before I could answer, I was

thinking of an answer for that. He said, “Mine are” And he meant it. He's got more friends than he ever did, which is saying a lot because he's had friends his whole life.

And it's a paradigm shift that I've embraced, not just because it's optimistic and self-serving, that it is, but because these other stories from The Life's Story bear that out as well, that you should find purpose and joy and excitement and friendships all new in your life in your last years.

[00:15:04] The other thing I'll mention is about something I learned about loss. As well, the concept of loss, I ask everyone in my interviews about losing friends and family along the way, because living a long life is a privilege, but there is a cost, I think. And that's your cost, right? That you lose the people that are close to you along the way. I spoke to 103-year-old Millie Keller, I interviewed her at work, her work.

We can talk about that separately.

Gregory Anne: I'm sorry, I'm laughing because it's astonishing. Fantastic.

Leslie Gold: She's another one I love. Um, but she's outlived everybody that was important to her, friends and family. And everybody that I've spoken to has a philosophical approach to death that they accept the [00:16:00] inevitability of it. But they neither fear it nor welcome it. It's just a stage in the journey of life. And they accept that there will be a time for them as there has been a time for everyone, but until then they will ring every bit of sweetness and enjoyment and purpose out of their lives. Of course they grieve when they lose friends and family, but they do not let the loss of these friends and families rob them of their joy in their own lives. I happen to be Jewish and it reminded me of my Hebrew school education many, many, many years ago. And I remember that there was a prayer that said that there's a time for everything under the sun, a time to be born and a time to die.

And that's to a person at least of these long lifers that I've spoken to who have lived exceptional lives that's how they view life. That “death is an inevitability, but, I don't dwell on it. I know it's coming and I don't let it rob me of my joy.”

[00:17:12] **Gregory Anne:** I have a friend, actually it's my husband's boss, he's a 92 and he is active, very close family, tons of friends, fundraising, galas, whatever.

And on his 91st birthday I wished him another happy years to come. I said something about next year, we'll do this again next year. And he said, well, you better stick around because I'm going to keep doing this for another 10. And I believe him, he just has this indomitable spirit of life is delicious and he is going to enjoy every moment of it.

And he's had a great career and still works and all that, but the, the attitude and the enthusiasm for every day when he sees the birds and the sun and everything. I love having him around.

[00:17:55] **Leslie Gold:** Are you familiar with the happiness curve?

Gregory Anne: Yes, I am.

[00:17:58] **Leslie Gold:** Right. So, being your focus of your, your work and your interests? I would think you would be, but, I don't know how hard you have hit it on your podcast in the past, but the data shows that on average, life satisfaction drops in midlife and begins recovering around 50 years old and it reaches its peak near our end of life.

[00:18:21] Whenever that is. The happiness curve is U shaped. So it's high in our youth. When we are ready to tear up the world and then there's a long, low slump in the middle of middle-age before it starts to rise again. And it's not a midlife crisis. The slump is a natural stage of life, and it's sort of the great paradox of happiness in that the decades, when we usually experience our greatest worldly success, we have the most money coming in, we're at the peak of our careers, is when our happiness craters. And if you're listening right now to the rebellious

wellness over 50 podcast, and you're in your forties or fifties, the good news is you're likely to end your life much happier than you are now.

[00:19:15] **Gregory Anne:** I was fascinated by that study or the results of many studies that prove that. And I can only imagine that in the middle of life, we have so many things on our minds. The kids or the job or building the company and when we get maybe more involved in politics and the economy around us. All of these things, and then little by little, I don't know how you're experiencing aging, but we start to care less about the stuff we can't really control.

Right? So that is a weight off of my mind. I still like politics and read about the economy, all that. It just sort of, it is what it is now.

[00:19:50] **Leslie Gold:** So the reason I wanted to speak to older folks in general is I was listening to a podcast. And it was about lockdown stories during COVID.

[00:19:58] And the one I heard was a hundred and four year old guy who was in lockdown with his 99 year old fiance. And my first thought was, what are you waiting for fiance? But he was a hundred and four or hundred and five, still driving by the way. And he was asked about the first pandemic, because he was alive in 1918 and old enough to remember.

[00:20:25] And it was at the time we were all our, all our collective hair was on fire. We were afraid to look at our neighbors, social media was crazy. We didn't know what this disease was, what this virus was, no one was leaving their house. You know, everything was terrible. Right. It was the end of the world. And he said, yeah, "We'll get through it."

And I thought that's the kind of wisdom that can only come from someone who seen it all. And to your point, Gregory, right? The older you live, the more you've seen, the less you worry about things. And that's what I think contributes to that happiness curve.

Gregory Anne: Speaking of worrying. Did you, have you interviewed people that are struggling with some kind of physical ailment, like a cancer, ongoing something and how they think about that?

[00:21:15] **Leslie Gold:** So I did interview, a couple, the Lebows, he's 99 she's 97. She still works one day a week and he plays tennis twice a week, but they lost a son to cancer, was not expected.

And as often happens with this, when you have a trauma, sometimes it can spur, I don't know if it spurs dementia, but if you're prone to have dementia, it can kind of accelerate it. So suddenly she was forgetting things that she had not done before. The stress of the death really brought it on and she's aware of it.

He is very aware of it because she will ask him the same question. You know, seven times a day or, you know, do I have to make dinner and he'll say, no, we're going to cousin Anne's for dinner. And then an hour later, she'd go, "I have to make dinner, right?" And he'll say, "No, we're going to cousin Anne's for dinner."

Anyway she of course is worried about that. That's a very scary prospect. Although she laughed and she said, "well, I have him." which is so wonderful. And the reason she said that is he will cheerfully answer the same question, asked to him innumerable times a day as if it's the first time he's been asked.

[00:22:48] They've been married almost 80 years. They have remarried three times in that they've just recommitted, and recommitted are always the oldest married couple, wherever they go, because they got married, you know, when they were like 19 or something. And I, that's love, man. That's love. My husband asked me to repeat something twice and I'm screaming at him, right?

[00:23:15] I've lost my patience with him, but when you can cheerfully respond to the same question, the seventh time it's asked over and over again, that is really love. And I thought about how the love has nurtured them. So, right. And she worries less because she's got him and he has lived up to that call. He is there for her. It's a beautiful story. It really is.

[00:23:42] **Gregory Anne:** And it shows a commitment for sure, to the idea of marriage. Being in a relationship to, to so that she knows that they have that same commitment and that no matter what happens to her, he will have her back so to speak.

[00:23:58] **Leslie Gold:** Right. And in the interview, I didn't notice her dementia actually.

Except when I listened back and I was editing the tape, I ask everybody to give their, their full name and their age when they were born. And. She gave me the year she was born and she said, and I'm 90. She couldn't remember exact 96, 97. And he quietly said, you'll be 97 on your next birthday. And she said, Yeah, I'll be 97 on my next birthday.”

I didn't think anything of it, but he's there for the assist when needed.

[00:24:31] **Gregory Anne:** Now you also collect, aside from your podcast interviews, you help other people collect stories from their loved ones. Tell us a little bit about that.

[00:24:40] **Leslie Gold:** I'm doing these podcasts. And I'm thinking about my own parents who are gone now, lived good long lives, 96 and 95 years old and Gregory were fire-breathing dragons right to the end.

God bless them. But of course, I miss them. And as I'm doing these in-depth intimate interviews with these extraordinary people, My parents do not have an extraordinary story to tell, they didn't live through the Holocaust, they didn't sue their grandchildren. None of these dramatic stories that I'm doing, but of course their stories matter to me.

And. I thought, oh, I'm so stupid. I'm a broadcaster. Why didn't I record them when I could have, for our own family's purposes, I'd give anything to hear my parents tell their own stories in their own voices again. And with that, I thought, well, that's a service worth providing. So. Started to offer the same kind of products, if you

will, for families' private use, and that we'll interview your aging parent or grandparent and put the same care that we do in the public podcasts.

We do the in-depth interviews. We score it with music, that's expertly edited. We wrap narration around it. We use historical sound when appropriate and package it as a personal audio documentary. So you'll always have those stories and and we're doing that, busier with that than anything else. And I'll tell you, in my work,

[00:26:19] I haven't done things that are bad or wrong, but I've not had work where I've really felt like I'm providing a really worthy service before. And I really do feel that we're doing that for so many reasons. First of all, the person that we are profiling feels honored by this. We're always framing their life in the loveliest of ways, even if they tell us about which they always do tell us about their struggles or their mistakes or their misdeeds.

Everybody has those in the arc of their life and the trajectory of their life. But they're put in context. And of course, if their family has asked for this, their family loves them and they've had heroic moments as well and in, in their lives also. And so they're very flattered by the way that we framed their story.

And it's also done at a time in their lives when there is a collective disregard for older folks, right? Advertisers stupidly don't appeal to 70, 80, 90 year olds. Even though they're spending money, even though boomers have a lot more money than millennials, right? *Money is agnostic, right?*

[00:27:41] Madison avenue wasn't but money isn't it's so foolishly overlooking this market, but they're not getting spoken to like younger consumers, unless people are selling adult diapers of course. Right. And for a lot of older folks, they're not having spontaneous interactions with people in the supermarket or at the coffee shop. First of all, because of COVID. But secondly, because people don't, they just don't talk to older people unless they're in serious distress. If they drop a bag on their foot in the supermarket, someone will run to aid them, but they don't strike up a normal conversation.

And that sort of cultural disregard is not lost on them. They feel it. Just like you and I see it they feel it as well. And so having their life story recorded in way that says I've lived a life worth preserving, worth talking about. And then one day when these aging parents and grandparents are gone, it becomes a family treasure.

[00:28:42] One that I wish I had as well. My father would tell a story. They were poor growing up in New Haven, Connecticut. Four boys. And they caught a chicken one day and they, I don't know why there was a chicken in the middle of New Haven, Connecticut. It's a city it's so stupid, but they got a chicken and they decided it would be their pet.

And so they lived on the third story walk up in a little apartment and they tied this chicken to the front porch of their third story, walk up with a rope. So it wouldn't go anywhere. And you already know the end of the story. Yeah, the rope was too long. And one day they came home to chicken, had jumped off the porch and hung itself.

And it's a terrible, terrible story. But my father would laugh in the same spot every time he told that story, which would make us laugh. Obviously, I know that story, but I would kill to hear him tell that story. And that's what we do in these recordings is that you have those stories forever. One last thing I'll say. I have a lot of pictures of my parents.

Of course everybody does, but maybe because I'm a radio person, I don't know, but I miss hearing their voice and for anyone that's ever clung on to the last voicemail from somebody that's gone and how they listened to that over and over again, then you know how deeply the sound of someone's voice can affect you.

And so that's what we provide as well. So, It's wonderful. It's wonderful. What can I tell you? It's wonderful.

Gregory Anne: I was reminded when you're talking about wishing that you had the voice, because you have pictures where we have like most people, old movies,

home movies, we called them in those days, not videos on our phone and we've now turned them into VHS.

Then they got turned into DVDs. I don't know how we're going to watch them, but there's no sound for much of it when we were little. And I see my grandmother talking to me and I want to know what she's saying, you know, or just to hear her voice again. So I think it's a wonderful, amazing gift.

So remind the listeners, your website again is a life's story.net. So, A L I F E S S T O R y.net. There's two S's in the middle and the podcast. Yeah, the podcast is of the same.

Gregory Anne Yeah, and I love the tagline “Stories that stay with you.” I've already known these three or four stories you told I'm going to have in my mind, or for a long time.

[00:31:17] Very inspirational. And I love that you brought this to me. I appreciate you reaching out because the focus, the umbrella, as we talked about at the beginning, is busting the myth that aging equals decline. It really does not have to.. And you told your first story, a woman who was in a wheelchair with MS , or the second story and it's so inspiring that I don't want people to feel like, well, that's inspiring cause they're inspiring people. Any of us can be inspired to continue to, like you said, get the joy out of life, the happiness, the relationships, the friendships. We don't have to settle for anything less because society doesn't talk to us.

[00:32:01] **Leslie Gold:** Yes. Yeah. So if you want to be, inspired, I would say, find a lively 80, 90, or a hundred year old person. And you'll feel a lot better about what the rest of your life is going to look like.

Absolutely.

Gregory Anne: I think that's great advice and I really appreciate your time, Leslie.

Leslie Gold: Thank you so much. It's been Gregory. Thank you so much for having me and continue with your good work, with your message. I've listened to a number of your episodes. They all make me feel better. So where, you know, we're on two different lanes, but we're running down the same highway you and I.

Gregory Anne: I liked that metaphor. And on that note, people, be back next week with another awesome guest. Thank you so much for listening and be well till next time. Bye. Leslie.