

# Rebellious Wellness <sup>over</sup> 50

## Too Young to Be Old with The Queen of Jeans



### Episode 87: Too Young to Be Old with The Queen of Jeans, Diane Gilman

**Gregory Anne:** Welcome back everybody to another episode of Rebellious Wellness Over 50 today. Of course, I have another delicious, juicy guest.

Her name is Diane Gilman. Diane, welcome.

**Diane Gilman:** Hi, Gregory. Well, I hear you wanna know a little bit about me, huh?

**Gregory Anne:** Yeah, Diane has a very interesting story and she is a force to be reckoned with in her seventies, in the workforce in retail and fashion. I think you're gonna love it. Diane, take it away.

**Diane Gilman:** Okay, so I was one of those individuals that was born with a purpose. From the time I was a toddler, I knew I wanted to be a fashion designer. I actually even remember when I was about six years old, being in a supermarket line with my mother, and 17 magazine used to be huge and it was Colleen Corby Teenage Model Weekend in New York. And I remember tugging on my mother's coat and saying, see that I'm gonna live there. and I'm gonna have that fur Coat Donna. I'm gonna be on Fifth Avenue and I'm gonna be a famous fashion designer and my mother's like rolling her eyes.

**Gregory Anne:** Where were you, you at the time Diane?

**Diane Gilman:** Los Angeles. I grew up in Los Angeles. I grew up in Homby Hills, which is sort of the poor man's Beverly Hills. And the background story for my family was there was absolutely going to be no discussion about being a career girl. My mother grew up as kind of an immigrant Jewish debutante in Portland, Maine.

Then the depression of 1929 hit when she just, I believe, graduated from high school. My mother became the chambermaid, my grandmother became the cook, and my poor grandfather became the super, they turned the mansion into a transient boarding house. And that's how my mother spent most of her time feeling enslaved until her late to mid twenties when my father happened to be somebody drifting through and they eloped to California.

Bottom line was she became the seamstress for the whole family. So when I announced as a very young girl, I wanted to be a fashion designer and I was begging to have my own little singer sewing machine and go to sewing school if there was such a thing. The answer was absolutely not. So at a certain point, when the sixties hit and through circumstance, I met Janice Joplin and Jimmy Hendricks and Jefferson Airplane.

I became their seamstress in the band. I took their denim, I took their jeans. I embroidered it. I jeweled it. I I love to do hand painting on denim I followed the

music scene to San Francisco and then one day just said, you know, you're in your mid twenties. Where are you going with this? A party cannot last forever.

With my last dime I got on a plane and came to New York and absolutely got rejected by everybody cuz I had no fashion education.

So I became, unbelievable but true, the worst waitress in history at max's kansas city and then met andy warhol and all those people. But during the day, the only job i could get was i was in the old lady's girdle and bullet bra department at bloomingdale's, way before madonna made girdles and bullet bars famous. And I read woman's wear daily, like it was a Bible cover to cover. One day I see this woman purposely marching towards the girdle department and I recognize her. She's the fashion coordinator of Bloomingdale's and she said, does anybody wanna volunteer for changing up the whole department?

I was the only one that raised my hand. And I said, oh, and by the way, I'm a designer and I have a collection because in between being the worst cocktail waitress ever, The unbelievable low of my life going from rock and roll chick to selling girdles , I, uh, I found time. I bought a singer sewing machine. I bought fabric and I sew my own little collection.

So bottom line, she gave me an appointment after rolling her eyes several thousand times. . Bloomingdale's discovered me and they ordered \$100,000 worth of designs, and I only had seven pieces of my collection. I burst out in tears. She said, why are you crying? I said, because I don't have the money to go out and buy the fabric or pay for the labor.

Bloomingdale's paid for everything. And gave me every window of the store. to Double trunk New York Times ads all for free. They really believed in talent. And I was off and running. Then somebody brought me a piece of fabric, like yada yada, 10 years later, 15 years later, and said, feel this and tell me what it is.

I said, it's buck skin suede they said. It's washable silk. I said, don't be ridiculous, . You can't wash silk. Well, you can now. I introduced washable silk to America. So at one point around 1993, I was in every department store in America and Harrods and Harvey Nichols in London with the titled Diane Gillman Collection, all washable silks.

And then, I realized everybody was making money, but me. It was a, you know, it's the old story of the creative and the suit, right? And when you don't have the

capitalization, but the talent, this is the oldest story in history. But I very foolishly, but amazingly sued them, lost my name for a few years, couldn't work at all, was dying.

And when I was just about personally bankrupt and thinking about going back to girdles or waitressing, I got a phone call and it was. Is this Diane Gilman, we're QVC, would you be interested in coming on air? And I thought, this is a joke. I said, you know, I can't come on air because I can't use my name.

And they said famously, oh, that's no problem. We'll just call you Diane. And so as of 1994, I premiered on QVC um, I switched about a year later to H S M because I felt it had much less structure to how you could design. And I sold my washable silks and I became pretty much number one in the fashion department, but it wasn't from the heart. My belief was always something was missing there in my career. I did well, but it wasn't fantastic. It wasn't my dreams. One day a woman knocked on my green room door and it was a new c e o Mindy Grossman of HSN that was around 2000. I'd never met her before.

I'd heard a million stories. I was terrified. She said, so what do you wanna do with your life? And it just came outta my mouth. I said, I wanna design jeans and sell them on air. The feeling was,

How could you think you could sell something so difficult to fit when you can't even go into a store and fi, you have to go through 8 million jeans? But I believed in it and partially because, at the time I was 59 years old, uh, 60 years old. I was a recent widow. I had gained a ton of weight after my husband's death.

I couldn't get into anything I wanted to wear anymore. So at the age of 60, you almost feel like the game is over as a female, and I hated that thought. And then one day light bulb moment, I said, Hey, You're a designer, design your own jeans, at least for yourself. Went out and bought three yards of denim, had a sewing room with, you know, professional sowers and stuff.

Had them take my measurements as a slightly pudgy, understatement, middle age woman where every part of my body had shifted, right? So I had a huge spare tire around the middle bottom line, made the gene, walked out of my apartment, was walking down 34th Street. Now you know, you have those moments you'll never forget.

There were two young guys in a manhole from ConEd. One of them looked. Checked me out and said, Hey lady, you got it going, . And I thought, wow. I turned around and said, you just made my week. No, wait a minute. , maybe you made my month or even my year. Um, and then I started thinking to myself, wouldn't other women wanna feel so much better about themselves, have a sense of marrying their younger self to their older self.

You know, cuz usually how we feel about ourselves in our head is not necessarily reflected in our body. And that was a proposal I brought to the CEO of Home Shopping Network and she said, okay, so I'm thinking I'm gonna get this big primetime premiere and no, no. I got 5:00 AM on a freezing cold miserable February morning, 5:00 AM Eastern Standard Time.

in three minutes, we sold all 5,000 jeans. We didn't have one jean left and I thought, bingo, I've hit a chord here. The baby boomer woman is desperate to get her sexy back, and that one light bulb moment at the age of 60 years old on my part reshaped my entire life. Jumped to number one among all tela- retail, fashion brands.

We actually peaked and stayed there for a long time at 100 million dollars retail, but that was only the US. Then I started thinking, okay, whether you're eating a coissant for breakfast or plate de pasta for lunch, guess what? We all have the same hormones as females. I will bet you every single country that has a Q V C has a need for this brand.

Because it wasn't just fashion as much as jeans became revolutionary in how hot they were on the market. I like to call it solution driven clothing. It was clothing that solved a problem for almost every female watching and made their lives better. Yeah, you wanted it, but in fact it was much more than that.

You needed it. So we took the brand to Canada. Bingo, go straight to number one. Q V C UK, number one Q V C. Italian number one Q V C. Germany, number one, QV C France, number one, and then shopping channel in Australia. So now we became a global brand and I did all of that past the age of 60. My greatest success came at 60 years old.

And onward. And this Thanksgiving I just stepped back from live TV because I thought to myself and I was saying it to you in our pre-show chat, a little bit like a gray divorce. I'm 77 and I thought to myself, okay, I'm still number one. I could stay here forever. , wouldn't you like to have an adventure

Diane? Wouldn't you like to take the skills you learned on tv apart from the fashion skills? So the skills of communication and understanding way beyond fashion. What generates excitement within your generation? And so now I'm gonna try to become a silver influencer on social media, and I'm very excited about it.

And my feeling is when you've got that level of excitement in your heart, you're gonna do a good job. So I kind of revitalized and rejuvenated myself, like I said to you, it. For the first shot, jumping off a cliff in the Grand Canyon on a Bunge cord, you haven't tested yet, but I'm gonna do it. I'm doing it.

**Gregory Anne:** Good for you. Good for you. And I have to note a couple of things. People that know me on this podcast know that I also have a business. I write copy and do marketing for coaches. And you said something initially about the success after you had those jeans made for yourself and then you thought, you didn't say women needed more genes. You said women wanted their sexy back. And I just wanna make the distinction when people are trying to message for themselves, . It's not like I give you three coaching sessions and a bonus at the end of the year with VIP day. It's, I help you get your sexy back or I help you put your finance right.

It's always about what it is for the person, how the person wants to feel no matter what we're doing. And with this podcast, my hope is to help women feel that they have options that at 70 something they can still be relevant, right. So I just wanted to make that point. It really has nothing to do with our conversation, but it does hit the nail on the head and the fact that all women being the same.

I think this is something we also forget, and all of you, silver influencers or young influencers, Are all really the same women with the same hormones. One thing that you also had was from the time you were a little girl, you had this dream, this thing that was within you, and you kept taking it to another level and not letting anybody, bras and girdles and bartended, and waitressing.

It was still there. you knew you had to come back to it. So for the people listening who feel like it's too late for you to do the one thing you really wanted, or you never really got the...

**Diane Gilman:** No. And I'll tell you what, that is the title of my book. I hate to hawk my book, but I love it so much too.

Too young to grow old. Never ever, ever say to yourself and discipline yourself not to. I'm too old for that. Oh, I'm past that. Yeah. Okay. I'm, I was past running a marathon in New York when I was five years old. That was never gonna happen, but you can customize your life to your wants. Or your needs.

They call me the Queen of Jeans and it was the customers that coronated me and gave me that title, and a group of almost 700,000 women strong who felt I had changed their lives to something so much more positive, that I realized as I go into my final phase of life, what I want to give back and how making women feel good is so important to me, the satisfaction of it. But a couple of women just recently wrote me and said, I lost my husband. I don't even know who I am anymore. Well, I felt that way. I looked in the mirror one day after I had lost my husband and I gained all this weight cuz I made food, my companion, and I thought who is this stranger?

Get outta my house. But it was me. I said to one of these women, chances are you like me, took care of your husband, and were the caregiver as he passed on. And what does that mean to you? Maybe, I know this sounds stupid, but it could be something as simple as you identify as a caregiver and you take in foster kittens, and feed them a bottle and bring them back to health again. I think the trick to aging successfully is to love the moment you're in. Yes, you can have one foot in the past. What is your favorite decade? My favorite decade was my thirties, so it was in the 1970s, and I loved, and I wanted to look like Farrah Fawcett which never happened.

But you've gotta love where you're at now, and you've got to realize that you are closing down your own options, you know? I was watching Clive Davis because they're launching a new movie about Whitney Houston that he generated, and they had to bring up the subject.

They said, Clive, you're 90 years old. Do you hit a lot of brick walls? Well, Clive Davis is amazingly successful and wealthy, but he said I'm overloaded with projects. I just pile them on. I gotta feel useful. I feel the same way. I didn't wanna skip a beat, and so many people said to me, oh, so you're stepping back from live TV you deserve it. You know what I deserve? I deserve to go on being useful, productive. creating an aura about myself that builds a female community and we support one another. And really and truly letting women know age should not diminish you. It should in fact augment you. You know, I'm all about pro-life, anti-aging, uh, has a negative quality to it.

Yeah. But you know, let's face it, if you wanna live and live well, you've gotta take care of yourself. You probably take better care of your car than you take of your body . Seriously. So this becomes part of your whole life structure of course, it's different. Your body is different. Your body needs more help and support.

Like I just saw a report that highly processed foods are a highway to losing your cognitive skills to Alzheimer's. Really? Someone had to tell you that. I had to hear that on CNN for years. I have actually, I must be the only woman in America that has never had a McDonald's. I once had french fries. You know what?

My food needs to have been alive about two weeks ago, a week ago lately. A happy life. Get to run around. Yeah, do what you wanna do, be eating grass, whatever. I believe like John Lennon, you are what you eat and what the fuel you put in and the positivity with that is what you're going to get out of it.

And in my book, which I'm just gonna show again cuz I love the cover that, couldn't believe they could do such a good job. Make me look that good. Um, I talk a lot about my third act and because I was in a form of entertainment most of my career for 30 years, which is television.

I guess I look at everything from a point of view of entertainment and how you construct that. So my third act is the final act with the really big song. For me, it would be a Broadway musical. It would be like a Busby Berkeley musical . And you've got the best song, the Best Dance. All the storylines tied together into something touching and romantic and meaningful.

And what it's really about is I truly believe most women, probably most everybody, sees this part of our life as a decline, and once you're done with your everyday job, whatever that was, from being a mailman to being an executive in the corporate world, to being a mother, life is over life. Life no longer has the same amount of meaning, wrong, wrong.

These are the precious years. These are the precious moments, you know, and Clive Davis, who I have so much respect for, said today life is what you make of it. And I think that is so true. So I'm hoping for the biggest musical finale, in history, but meaningful. I wanna take my communication skills,

and my interest in what the mass audience would be most benefited by, doesn't just stop with fashion. It's about food. It's about travel, it's about exercise. It's about customizing your life to be appropriate to the moment you're in. And there's a

movie out, I'm gonna admit I've never seen it, but I love the title of it, the Spectacular

NOw, that's my third act.

**Gregory Anne:** I love it. And I think the important thing for people that are listening that are just over 50 or maybe creeping towards 60, it is still hard to imagine what we will be like in our seventies, our eighties. You know when you're a kid and your mother tells you, oh, you shouldn't go out in the sun without sunscreen, cuz one day you're gonna have spots.

And we were like, nevermind. That's not gonna happen to me. Yeah. So this is the same thing. You gotta start now for the life you want later. If you're not exercising, get up and move something. Some part of your body needs to move every day. If you find yourself eating more stick it in the microwave, heat it up kind of foods.

See if you can change to some fresh foods a couple times a week to start with, right? Because we're laying down the foundation for that third act. And if we don't have a healthy body foundation, we won't get to do all the spectacular things we wanna do.

**Diane Gilman:** All my life I've thought about how I wanted to age, so I always at least passed the age of about 25, made sure I exercise. I still exercise, but I don't go to an exercise class because nobody is going to customize an exercise class for the thing

that limits me, right? You can't hate yourself or be angry at yourself for aging. You've just got to create and say to yourself, okay, so I can't do an aerobics class that 20 year olds are doing. I'll create my own aerobics, and I do. And if I put a whole reel of rock and roll on, I'll dance around my house for two hours.

That's my aerobics for the day. But I got my exercise in. Yeah, I did it my way and it made me happy. And so I would also say that your third act is about customization. Nobody is doing it for us.

And no one instructs you how Not to The fact that we just had the FDA say, if you eat nothing but over-processed foods, you're going to cut 10 to 20 years off your life and you're probably going to get Alzheimer's 20 years sooner than you should.

That's just common sense. Yeah. You gotta eat foods with nutrients. We are growing older by the minute. They say now children that are born today, 50 will only be half their life. It actually may only be a third of their life, but who prepares us for it?

Who gives us any kind of guidelines? Half the time, I feel like I'm in the ageism jungle with a machete. , cutting it down and getting my own pathway by myself. It's almost like people are so terrified of aging that you just don't talk about it when in fact it can be pretty great.

Up to you to make it that way. I'll tell a quick story. I was lucky. I went into a niche business tela- retail, that was by nature. an older customer and we all grew older together for 30 years. Usually, in entertainment, they don't forgive you for growing older.

You should look the same for 30 years, I had breast cancer in between it all. So that kind of changed my look. But what do you do for yourself? So there was a woman, someone was telling me this story. She lost her husband and she had been in the hospital a lot with him, sitting with him.

And she was also a gardener. She loved gardening, so she used to bring him bouquets every day. and the nurses would come in and say, oh, those bouquets are so beautiful. You know, the children's floor is right below when your husband gets tired of the bouquet. Can we take it down to one of the really sick kids?

So then she started making bouquets and dropping them off at the floor below, and they were so popular that then the gift shop in her local hospital said, think you could supply like 20 bouquets a day and now it's a national business. And she does it nonprofit. But what a beautiful story about finding your niche in the moment you're in, and feeling loved for it, purposeful, doing a good deed.

You know, that is honestly what breast cancer taught me. I'm lucky enough to live on Fifth Avenue across from the park. I'm in a very non-inclusive, exclusive industry fashion, and you live in a bubble.

And when you get a disease like breast cancer, you suddenly realize it doesn't care how much money you have or how glamorous you are, or who you know, or who knows you. You're brought down to a level of reality. I came out the other end with a sense of empathy and compassion I would've never had otherwise, which I think

totally prepared me to go into my third act and try and widen my communication to many levels and make women feel better about where they're at.

Cuz aging for females is not easy. But yeah, breast cancer, honestly, when I look back on it two and a half years, three years ago, um, it was a big plus in my life. It was a big, huge classroom for me.

**Gregory Anne:** Yeah. That's interesting. I've heard a lot of people speak positively about it once they're on other side and healthy.

**Diane Gilman:** Yep. I spoke positively about it when I was in the middle of it. Even had an incredible experience. So after chemotherapy a double mastectomy, I had to go for radiation, which is always depressingly in the basement. Right. everyone's in the waiting room. Nobody talks. It's a very silent, very kind of grim thing.

And then you go into a little dressing room area with a locker about that big. What you're supposed to do with that, I'm not sure, but there were a group of Spanish women, and I think they were all from the Bronx and they were all getting radiation. We all came in at sort of the same time every morning and they would speak in Spanish.

I always came in like looking my best. I was me and they would stop talking and kind of take a glance. And so one day I just brought bagels for everybody. . And I said, hi, I'm Diane. Let's have breakfast together. These are not women I would've ever met otherwise. And you know it got to the point where I would walk in and they would go, hi, Diane.

Hi. Everybody would hug me and I'm tearing up. And that was one of the greatest moments of my life. I touched base with my newly accorded sense of humanity. I really opened up my heart. That's what I learned from breast cancer. I really opened up my heart and I never closed it again.

**Gregory Anne:** You know it's interesting. I've been listening to Anderson Cooper's podcast.

That, I can't remember the name, but he started it when his mother died and he was going through her things.

**Diane Gilman:** Gloria Ban Vanderbilt.

**Gregory Anne:** Right. So, so many beautiful stories. And he had one episode where he had people call in and leave a story about who they lost and the name of the person and La la la.

And this one woman said that she was with her soulmate for 25 years and he recently died. And she said, you know, I, I realized that my life isn't over. It's richer, and I am open to bringing the love that we had together to the rest of the world just because he's not here. I still have the love to give and I'm just like, now I'm tearing up.

I just thought that was such a beautiful. .

Yeah. I think that it goes one of two ways for you with a life-threatening disease like that. And, I think one way is, and it makes me so angry when I hear people say thing like life sucks. No, it's your attitude. It's your attitude. That sucks. Not life.

I came out of it with a sense of purpose. I knew what I needed to do the rest of my life. That's why I'm going into social media for a broader platform. I knew that I had the ability to make a lot of women happy. And if I had to leave a legacy fashion-shmasion but being able to do that, that's a gift.

On you if you have a gift and you don't utilize it. So that's what I got out of having my life threatened and being able to come out the other end of it. And it's a different life. Everything has much, much more meaning for me. So I feel lucky. Really, really lucky. Lucky that I got a chance to expand myself and try and find and, and really be able to find my true heart.

I loved my craft so much that it was really and truly never about the money. It was always about the pleasure of it all. And that's how I feel today about communication.

And I think the word pleasure is an important one. If we can look for the pleasure, like you said, it's this moment of now that we have.

And I always think, rather than I have to, I get to, I'm sure that's a phrase that you use.

**Diane Gilman:** Oh yes, that's so true.

**Gregory Anne:** I get to find the pleasure in this moment of calling American Airlines to change a flight but I still get to go on the trip because they made it easy for, they said there are no change fees anymore.

So I get to change this, I'm going to see a friend who's quite sick.

**Diane Gilman:** But the real thing is you get to travel.

**Gregory Anne:** I get to travel, I get to see this woman who I love. So it doesn't matter what we're doing, we can just flip it on the worst days, we can still flip it and make it something else.

**Diane Gilman:** Yeah. And there's. A chapter in my book titled Don't Wear Mohair when you're going through barbed wire. And basically what that is, is don't sweat the small stuff. You don't have time anymore.

I was like, Scarlet O'Hara, oh, I'll think about it tomorrow. You know, I got breast cancer because basically I knew something was wrong, but I kept. , well, I've gotta take a flight tomorrow. Well, I've got a set of shows. Well, I can't disappoint. I mean, I don't have the time for that. And it's probably nothing.

These are and can be your best moments past the age of 50, 55. And by the way, if you're in the corporate world and they make you feel that much older and that unuseful

find your niche. Maybe you wanna become an entrepreneur, open yourself up for possibilities, and I guarantee you those possibilities will come your way. It's up to you to recognize them.

**Gregory Anne:** So Diane, where can we find you on social? Are you Diane Gillman on Instagram?

**Diane Gilman:** I'm the Diane Gillman. The Diane com Gilman. . The Diane Gilman are all in small caps.

I've got my website. Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, and we try to answer anybody that that posts a question. We will. We will absolutely get to you to answer that question, and I'm very, very, very excited. It's a whole new world for me, and I think honestly that is the key to

growing older successfully is still having that sense of wonder. That sense of discovery, that sense of, oh, it's all new. Almost like a kid learning that first time you ride the bike and you don't fall off and kill yourself. You get the balance. That's what I'm feeling right now, and it's kind of wondrous.

**Gregory Anne:** I well, I can tell, your energy is delicious . So what do you wanna, what's the last thing you wanna tell the women listening to this podcast? No matter what age they are>

**Diane Gilman:** it ain't over till it's over as Yogi Barra said, you know, I was watching interview with Jeff Goldblum, who, I love him. He said you could call me a late bloomer because I'm never gonna stop trying to be better. I'm never gonna stop trying to discover something new about myself, how to expand myself, how to go way beyond my reach.

And that's what I would say. You know, I think that most of us have this image that as you get older, you should get shoved aside by society. Nonsense. We're the biggest generation on earth. Well, how come we all went quiet? Suddenly right after the sixties. I don't get it, but I'll tell you what, we need to band together.

We need to organize ourselves. We need to have a unified voice, and we need to get what's ours and what we deserve, which is a lot. Never give up. Never give in. It's never too late.

**Gregory Anne:** Thank you very much. That's a perfect way to end. Diane, you've been wonderful. Thank you for your time, people listening. I will see you next week with another fabulous guest on Rebellious Wellness Over 50. Be well till then.