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SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What made you decide to write about late bloomers?

Five years ago I came across a *New York Times* article about a 65-year old Kentucky woman who had waited 39 years to fulfill her dream of joining the Peace Corp. Reading her story, I was so inspired that I decided then and there to write a book about late bloomers—people who, no matter what their age, haven't given up on themselves and their dreams. And even though I'd never written anything for publication before, that's what I did. I interviewed over 100 women and chose 12 from all walks of life, with a variety of obstacles to overcome, who accomplished extraordinary things in their 40's, 50's 60's, even 70's. One woman became a flight attendant at 71. Another didn't even have a high school diploma in her 40's and became a professor of anthropology at Brown University at age 60. Twelve phenomenal everyday women.

Many people wish they could do something else, but are powerless to make a change. What advice can you offer them?

1. Mix it up! Ask yourself what you're doing that you want to stop and what you're *not* doing that you want to begin. If you keep doing the same thing the same way, you'll get the same results. Create a little space in your life and see what happens.
2. Take a step and see how it feels. Don't get ahead of yourself. Just because you're signing up for a pre-med class doesn't mean you have to commit to four years of medical school. On the other hand, if you never take a step, you'll never know what you could have done. As the centenarian I quote at the beginning of my book says, "If I had known I would live to be a hundred, I would have taken up the violin at 40. By now I could have been playing for 60 years!"

3. Don't fall into an either/or thinking. If you think the choice is to either keep working at a job you don't love and support yourself or follow your passion and starve, you won't get very far. Say you're a lawyer who secretly wants to be an artist. You don't need to quit your day job in order to draw. After work one night, why not just paint a picture? As I said, take a step and see how it feels. If you like it, paint more. It's that simple. Eventually, you might be able to parlay your passion into a profession; but even if you can't, your life will be richer and more satisfying than if you hadn't painted at all.
4. Persist, persist, persist. Most people give up on their dreams too soon.
5. Turn a deaf ear to self-doubt & naysayers. Everyone gets discouraged and loses confidence from time to time. But it's important to turn a deaf ear to self-doubt and just keep on going. The corollary to this is to also turn a deaf ear to naysayers. Successful late bloomers care deeply about people, but along the way they stop caring what others think of their choices. Ultimately, our lives are ours to live and no one else's.

Did the women in your book face discrimination in the working world? If so, how did they get around it?

Many did. Seventy-one year old Evelyn Gregory was turned down by at least five airlines before being hired by Mesa, the parent company of US Air Express. And Irma Elder, who at age 52 became the first women auto dealer in Detroit, faced both age and gender discrimination. These women dealt with it in different ways. The bottom line is that if you're faced with a concrete wall and you want to get to the other side, you've got a few choices. You can either blast through it, walk around it, dig under it, climb over it...or act as if it doesn't exist and walk right through it. The flight attendant found a way around. She became a gate agent and let the corporate brass get to know her. Six months later, she applied again to be a flight attendant, and this time was accepted. The auto dealer ignored the wall. She flaunted her femininity by wearing skirts and high heels and just kept focused on doing the best job she could. Today she's the CEO of one of the ten largest Hispanic-owned companies in the nation.

How did you find these women?

I kept my eyes and ears and open to the media, but mostly I relied on word-of-mouth. I didn't want to write about famous women. I wanted to find everyday women that others wouldn't dismiss as having more money, more talent, more connections than the rest of us. Everywhere I went, I told people I was writing

about late bloomers—even before I’d written a word! People would say to me, “Oh, you should interview my mom.” Or, “You’ve got to meet my friend.” And I’d follow through on these tips. There’s an incredible power in making one-on-one connections. It becomes exponential.

You’re now writing a book about men. Are you seeing any differences between men and women late bloomers?

There are more similarities than differences, but in general, men’s sense of themselves—even in 2005—comes from their work, the amount of money they make, and how well they’re able to provide for their families. So on that level it’s more difficult for them to make life changes than it is for women, especially before retirement. Even after retirement, many men have been conditioned to think of the later years as a time to play golf and relax; but that model doesn’t work as well as it used to in our present economic climate. It also doesn’t work as well when you consider that people are living longer and longer. If a guy retires at 65 and dies at 70, maybe the golf thing is great. But if he lives 30 more years, that’s a lot of time to fill. By providing role models of men who have gone back to school in their 70’s, or who have successfully transitioned, for instance, from being ophthalmologists to pastry chefs, I want to encourage men think outside the box. One guy I interviewed had been a real estate developer before retirement and went to art school in his 70’s. Now 82, he’s a wonderful painter. Last fall he had a show at a prestigious gallery in San Francisco and sold every one of his paintings!

What common traits do these late bloomers share?

- 1) A lack of bitterness. They’ve learned from past experiences and mistakes, but aren’t embittered by them. Bitterness is one of those things that weighs us down and keeps us from defying gravity. Rainelle Burton, a dyslexic who wrote a critically-acclaimed first novel in her 50’s, at one point lived in a car with a baby in the winter in Detroit. That’s how poor she was. As I say in the book, she’s been through hell, but has emerged without a trace of soot on her spirit.
- 2) A sense of humor. They don’t take life—or themselves—too seriously. They’re having fun.
- 3) Persistence. I can’t stress this enough. Most people give up on their dreams too soon, sometimes just a hair short of the goal. These people didn’t.

- 4) Openness. Life is full of possibility, but not everyone is open to change. Successful late bloomers embrace the future. Forced to retire at age 78 for medical reasons, one late bloomer said to me, "I'll find something else to do. Obstacles are just stepping stones to new opportunities." *That's* what I mean by openness!

Final thoughts?

We all have more potential than we realize and our lives have more possibilities than we can fathom. Even if you don't achieve your dream, just going for it is worth the effort. Ultimately, the journey is as important as the destination. The bottom line is that no matter what your age, it's not too late!