

â??80 Over 80â?•: Interviews with elders is all about fostering respect for long life, endurance and the wisdom available to us

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One too many magazines hyping the â??30 under 30â??â?•or â??40 under 40â?• jolted a San Francisco geriatrician into countering with an â??80 Over 80â?• project. After three years of interviewing these older city residents, the results can now be seen at 80over80sf.org.

â??It crystallized something in me: What about seniors?â?• Dr. Anna Chodos, an associate professor of medicine at the University of California-San Francisco, said of this â??passion projectâ?• outside of her regular work. She saw it as a campaign to â??give attention to older people. I donâ??t think people really realized the breadth and diversity of older people in the city, particularly the older, older, not the newly initiated 60-year-old.â?•

The 80 Over 80 project will be discussed Thursday on KQED Radioâ??s Forum (9-10 a.m.July 28). If you want to call or submit comments during the live show on 88.5 FM, dial (866) 733-6786, email forum@kqed.org, tweet, or post on Facebook.



Dr. Anna Chodos

There were obstacles along the way: the difficulty of identifying 80 elders willing to share their stories, recruiting interviewers and translators, and the pandemic restricting contact to those comfortable on Zoom. A small staff and 27 volunteers conducted the video interviews, wrote short summaries for each and added photographs on some. A book is on the way.

Feeling celebrated

While Chodos intended the project as a way to enlighten the public about life after 80, the good along with the challenges, she eventually concluded that its real value may have been for the interviewees themselves â?? â??in the sense that I wanted them to feel celebrated, maybe as a group but also individually.â?•

Rather than focus, as so much of society does, on the downsides of aging, Chodos chose to recognize that some things get better. â??You never hear about the positive changes with aging, which makes it so important to emphasize the good stuff.â?•

Whatâ??s the good stuff? â??Actually, the things that improve are quite remarkable, like your ability to recognize patterns, resiliency â?¦ overall better emotional health. Literally the components of wisdom are much stronger.â?•

Every one of the interviewees lived through some sort of difficulty: a health crisis, loss of a loved one, financial problems. But they persisted.

Life is resiliency

â??Seeing all those people who got through those things gave me hope,â?• she said. â??Life is resiliency. People need to learn to not be afraid of growing older. Who doesnâ??t want to be less freaking out about everything?â?•

How one views aging can have a real-life impact, she noted, citing research by Becca Levy, a professor of psychology at the Yale School of Public Health. As Levy details in her book â??Breaking the Age Code,â?• Chodos said, â??age beliefs, it turns out, can steal or add nearly eight years to your life.â?•

Older people are the fastest growing demographic in San Francisco. In two years, one in every four San Franciscans will be 60 years of age or older. For the first time in human history, there are more people in the world over 64 than under five. How society views aging has a direct impact on what resources are available to them.

The reframing aging movement

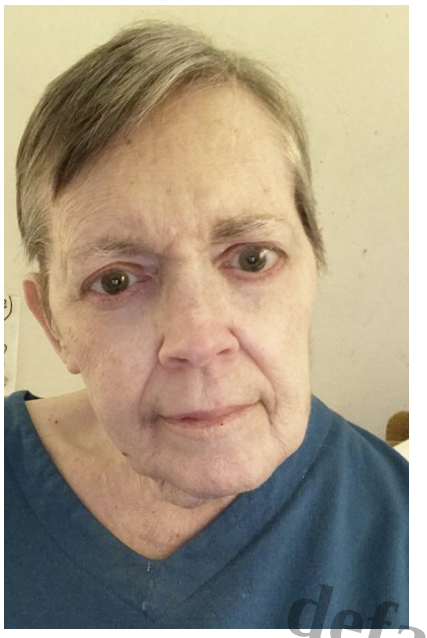
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â??Itâ??s back to just respect for older people,â?• Chodos said, but not in the way many might think. â??Sometimes you hear respect for elders, and you think because you need to care for them. But thatâ??s not really what it is. Itâ??s humility for the fact that people have had a long life, they have been through some shit and have something to say about it, and are there to offer you wisdom and support, and a model. Thatâ??s what itâ??s about. â?¦ All of us at all ages can learn from these stories and take something away.â?•

80over80 is part of a movement to bring a balance to our picture of aging. At one extreme, thereâ??s Slate magazineâ??s annual ranking of â??The Most Influential 80-Plus-Year-Olds in America.â?• But San Franciscoâ??s â??80 Over 80â?• celebrates ordinary folks. As does San Francisco Senior Beat, which profiles residents 50 and older, and the city Department of Disability and Agingâ??s â??Reframing Aging Project.

Margaret Graf, coordinator of a community-building program in the Outer Sunset called Senior Power, is looking for ways to share the â??80 Over 80â?• template with other California and U.S. communities. â??This is an exciting project. Not only for people who are in my age category (mid-80s). This is the roadmap, guys. This is what youâ??re getting to.â?•

A sampling of â??80 Over 80.â?•



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Jeane â??Jeannieâ?• Orjas | 80

North Beach Chinatown | Interviewed in August 2021

Jeane Orjas came to San Francisco in 1963 to study for her teaching degree at San Francisco State University but ended up going into the unskilled clerical army instead. She identifies as a lesbian and credits the Unitarian Universalist Church as being a root and ground for her. She has several health conditions and is receiving training from the Lighthouse for the Blind to use the accessibility functions on her iPad.



Jun Jie Cao | 95

Potrero Mission | Interviewed in August 2021

Jun Jie Cao moved to San Francisco 20 years ago to help care for his grandchildren. He has an infectious optimism and the contentment of appreciating what you have. He and his wife spend their time learning calligraphy and computers, which he first picked up during the pandemic at the age of 95.



Ernestine Moore | 82

Haight Castro Noe | Interviewed in March 2022

Ernestine Moore, born and raised in New York, came to San Francisco after the 1989 earthquake to live closer to her son. She credits her education as a nurse as giving her options and independence that allowed her to make a life for herself. She enjoys talking to kids at events for students so she can share the importance of an education. She also talks about childhood sexual abuse, Sharing has helped her, she said, and she hopes it may help others.

Zu Jean Lee | 87

Potrero/Mission | (Interviewed in March 2021)

Zu Jean Lee has lived in the U.S. for more than 50 years and in San Francisco for most of that to be closer to family who settled here. She has limited mobility and gets around with a wheelchair. Her phone and computer allow her to connect with friends and family and play computer games. She lives alone but finds community with the people in her building and people from her church.



Janie Bell | 89

Twin Peaks | interviewed in April 2022

Janie Bell moved with her parents from Texas to San Francisco as a young child. She spent her career as an advocate for children with disabilities and worked in recreation for the city. She is named after her motherâ??s grandmother, who was born into slavery; her fatherâ??s mother was also born into slavery.



Pat Jones | 82

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Japantown Presidio Marina | Interviewed in October 2020

Pat Jones moved to San Francisco when she was 24 years old from London to get away from her â??dysfunctional family,â?• she said. She has a masterâ??s degree in rehabilitation counseling and worked for nonprofit agencies for more than 40 plus years before retiring. She lives with chronic fatigue syndrome, and works part-time for Senior and Disability Action.



Luis Alonzo MuÃ±oz | 89

Haight Castro Noe | Interviewed in June 2021

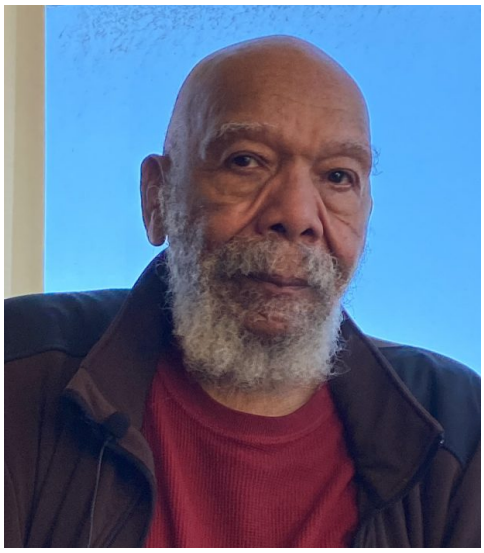
Luis Alonzo MuÃ±oz is a journalist and a visual artist. Originally from El Salvador, he worked across Latin America before coming to San Francisco. His art is interwoven with San Franciscoâ??s history, and in the late â??70s, he founded Tiempo Latino.



Jack Anderson | 89

Richmond | Interviewed in May 2022

Jack Anderson is a San Francisco native from a Jewish family. He attended Lowell High School, taught at San Francisco State University and City College. He also started the first visual performing arts program at Lowell, and became the department head. He also started the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.



Marcus Scruggs | 81

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Haight Castro Noe | Interviewed in December 2021

Marc Scruggs has lived in San Francisco since the â??60s, when he soon met his partner, Harry, on a fog-fillled beach. They were together until soon before this interview, when Harry passed away. Scruggs said he has never felt like an outsider in the city: He promoted nonviolent communication strategies to build community; he also appeared in some films.



Eugenia Sands | 91

Hayes SOMA FIDI | Interviewed in March 2022

Eugenia Sands came to San Francisco from Memphis, Tenn., in 1969 as part of her job in the Merchant Marine. That job took her all over the world, but she later worked a seamstress making costumes for the stars performing at the San Francisco Opera.



â??Diamondâ?• Dave Whitaker | 83

Potrero/Mission | Interviewed June and July 2021

Diamond Dave is a legend of the cityâ??s beatnik and hippie era. He was one of the first radio hosts on KPOO, and said to have helped set Bob Dylan get started. Feb. 2, 2016, was designated â??Diamond Dave Whitaker Dayâ?• by the Board of Supervisors. Today, he has a room and garden in part of a warehouse turned communal living space in the city.

Category

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