

# Catching YOUR Memories

THE PODCAST

WITH DIANE ATWOOD

Risa Losee on being “inspirational” was published on June 30, 2022

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Diane Atwood: Hey everyone, this is Diane Atwood, and you are listening to the Catching Your Memories podcast. Everybody has an inspiring story, a memory, an experience to share if only someone would ask. That’s where I come in. In this episode, Rita Losee, who is a registered nurse, an author, an entrepreneur, and what she calls a Soaring Senior, doesn’t just deliver inspiration, she’s all about inspiration. Be inspired. Take action. Rita coined the phrase and that pretty much sums up who she is. Her entire life she has been inspired to do various things, and take on numerous challenges. She rarely lets things slow her down, even a bad fall on the ice this past winter. Rita loves people and loves adventure. She has lots of memories to share but was quick to tell me that it’s important to her to always be making new memories. Let’s go now to Rita Losee, who by the way, is 80 years old.

Diane: Well, welcome, Rita. This is actually about the third welcome of the morning that we have done because we've been having one computer problem after another.

Rita: And here we are. We finally made it, it seems

Diane: That’s true, we finally made it. Now the reason I asked you to do this particular podcast episode, Rita, is because I think you're amazing. And what came to my attention back in February was yet another example of your amazingness. You had a fall. Now, the fall in itself is not what made me think you're amazing, but how you reacted to it. So first of all, tell us about the fall that you had.

Rita: Well, I was out walking. I had a cup of coffee in downtown Brunswick with a really interesting, neat young businessman in the community. I had set a goal as of the first of January to walk, run, hike 5 miles a day every day between January 1 and March 21, which I did the previous year and didn't have a fall on the ice.

But we had a very icy winter. I'm sure you remember that. The sidewalks were clear, but as I came around the corner at Bowdoin, there was a section of sidewalk that hadn't been plowed at all, and it was just lumpy, bumpy ice. So, my options were to step onto the campus for a bit and walk or to walk around the corner on the street with traffic behind me, which didn't seem like a good idea. So, I went onto the campus, and it turned out that wasn't such a good idea either, because I hit a patch of black ice and went smack. So, uh, I landed on my butt and then I flipped back and I smacked my head. So, my first reaction was to say words that my mother didn't teach me and she certainly wouldn't have approved of. The second reaction was to say, am I going to be able to get up and walk home? So, there was only one way to test the answer to that question, and that was to see if I could get up and walk home. I did that, and it wasn't the most comfortable walking that I ever did, but I did that. As I retrospected that experience, the question, of course, was, and I did have some concussion symptoms. But the question that I asked was, I'm an 80-year young woman. Typically, if a woman in my age cohort takes a hit on the ice as hard as I did, she wouldn't have walked home. She would have been calling 911, and some nice people from the ambulance company would have driven me directly to the hospital. That didn't happen. And there are a couple of reasons why I think that wasn't my outcome. One is I have exercised for virtually my entire life, so I have stronger bones and more muscle mass enclosing those bones. So, I think that was a significant factor. And the other factor in my recovery were the products that I use in my business that actually activate my stem cells. So it was a good experience in one level because it supported for me, the work that I do in terms of staying healthy has a payoff right now.

Diane: Right. Some people won't be able to get past the fact that you're 80 years old.

Rita: I know. And I'm doing the best I can to look younger all the time.

Diane: Well, I have a ton of questions that I want to ask. I'm going to try to be logical about this. So for me, that means I want to go backwards a little bit. You have always been active all your life? Is that just who you are?

Rita: I think, yes. I grew up on a farm in West Bath in the 40s and 50s. We didn't have television, we didn't have cell phones, didn't have very many toys, but we had trees, and the New Meadows River to swim in, and ice skates and sleds. So for me, play was being outdoors. I also had a mother who loved being outdoors. I had a mother who was very physically active. She passed about six or seven years ago. And one of the things that astounded the medical people who took care of her was the fact that she was on one medication and that was for thyroid replacement. Doctors were absolutely astonished that you could be that old and not on a dozen medications.

Diane: How old was she?

Rita: She was 97 and a half when she died.

Diane: So she was a very strong role model for you.

Rita: Yes. And I was one of ten kids. Ultimately, I was the second daughter, so I didn't have a whole lot of one-on-one experience with just my mom because I was one of the crowd. But one of my very early childhood experiences is walking with her along the shore one gorgeous, sunny summer morning, and it was probably 5:30 in the morning. And we were going out to the Western Point to bring the cows in for milking. So, yes, and my grandfather, her father, was a student at the University of Maine. I think he graduated in like 1913. One of the stories that was told about him was how he bicycled from U Maine to the farm in West Bath. Now we're talking no ten speeds, probably no pavement. And he arrived on the farm on a hot June day. He came down the hill, went right by the house, out through the fields, and rode his bicycle into the water.

Diane: He did this on purpose?

Rita: Yes, because I think he was really hot and ready for a swim. But that created in me, although I certainly am not conscious of it, but that created in me an awareness that you got attention and pride from people in your family if you were very physically active. What a gift that was to me. I have joked on more than one occasion, that when I was in high school, girls got excused from gym if they were having their periods. And I think there were young women that I went to high school with that had three periods a month, whereas I thought it was just really great fun to get down there and run around in the gym and bat a ball or hoot and holler and just be physical. So I think that is when we talk about genes, I think maybe some of our attitudes also we also come in with and I was born in an environment where physical activity was approved of.

Diane: And you liked it. But I know that in your 80 years, you've had some challenges that prevented you from being as physically active as you would like to be. One of them being that you got Lyme disease.

Rita: Yes, I picked that up while I was hiking the Appalachian Trail. I did the whole trail in 2000, and one of the souvenirs I brought back was Lyme disease. And that created challenges of a different kind for me because by then I had also climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and I had also done Hawaii Ironman. So, all of a sudden my coping mechanism, my main coping mechanism, a great self-esteem source, got taken away. There literally were times between 2000 and 2015 when if I went for a walk, I could last about five minutes before I felt like I was going to faint. And then I had to go back and get on the couch.

Diane: Wow. Now, how old were you at that time?

Rita: Well, I was 58 when I did the trail.

Diane: Okay. And how did you know that you had Lyme disease? It seems like it had settled in a bit before you even realized it.

Rita: Well, actually, I was hiking in New York or New Jersey, came into the shelter one night, and when you were through hiking, the very first thing you do is you take off your pack, you sit down and you take off your boots. And I bent down to take off my boots and I saw what looked like a freckle on my right shin. And I went, I don't remember I had a freckle there, and I reached out and touched it and it wiggled. And I went, aah that's what those look like. I was familiar with dog ticks, but I had never seen a deer tick before. And I probably pulled four or five of those off while I was coming through New York and New Jersey. And those were only the ones that were on the front of my body because I could have had them on my back. Being by myself, I wasn't going into the shelters every day and taking off my clothes and saying, hey, guys, let's do a tick check here.

Diane: I've got to stop you for a second. Did you do the whole trail solo?

Rita: Yeah.

Diane: Wow. That's a story in itself.

Rita: Yes. And people ask me, wasn't that scary? Because they're thinking of big hairy guys with intent to do harm. And I was just talking to somebody the other day. The scariest part. At that time, there were a couple of places in the south where you had to cross four-lane highways. So you'd look up, can I get my body and my pack and my boots, which are not made for running — can I get across the four lanes before that 18 Wheeler gets here? That was the scariest part. I think now they've got those under, you know, so you don't have to do that anymore. But that was really scary. The other thing that helped a lot was I made an agreement with myself very early on the trail. I couldn't quit when I was having a bad day. I had to wait till I was having a good day before I quit.

Diane: That's smart.

Rita: That little idea can get you through a lot of bad days.

Diane: Did you have a lot of bad days?

Rita: Well, when I got sick, I had a lot of bad days.

Diane: When you got sick, was it long after the Appalachian Trail?

Speaker B: No. I came back to Maine for the 4th of July. We had a big family gathering on the 4th of July every year. And I got to Massachusetts, got picked up by a family member, and came for the 4th of July. And I woke up one morning and it felt like it took me 45 minutes to turn my head from the right to midline and

I had no energy. I was just wiped. So I said, hey, Rita, and I knew I'd been bitten because I pulled ticks off. So, I gave myself 24 hours. If I didn't feel better in 24 hours off, I would go to the ER. So, I didn't feel better, and I went to the ER and told the doctor I thought I had Lyme disease and why. And he said I think you do, too. I'd rather talk about what you're doing, but we need to do business here. So, he started me on antibiotic. I got a two-week course of doxycycline, which is the traditional Lyme Disease antibiotic. And within that two weeks, I was back hiking 20 miles on the trail again. But I think the dose that I got slowed the bacteria up but didn't stop them.

Diane: So how long before it reared up again?

Rita: By early August I was close to finishing and I was tired of the whole scene by then. I remember one awful day I was hiking by myself. The trail in Maine was rough and rocky and the foliage hadn't been clipped back so I was tired of being wet. I was tired of being tired. And I spent one afternoon literally balling at the top of my lungs. And I think there are probably some bears up there who I'm part of the legend of the trail because I did. I howled and most of the time the roadways are in the valleys. And that afternoon I got to the valley and there was no road. I had to go up and up and up again to find another roadway. A guy picked me up and took me into town and was so concerned about me, he called the next day to make sure I was okay.

Diane: And this is after you had finished the course of antibiotics?

Rita: Oh, yes, weeks after.

Diane: Okay. So, the infection obviously was progressing.

Rita: Right. And I also need to acknowledge that the diet that I was eating while I was hiking the trail was probably the worst diet I've ever eaten in my entire life because the goal is to get as many calories into as little possible weight in your pack. You don't carry fresh fruits and vegetables because they're heavy. They get mushy. So, one of the things that I ate during that period of time was I ate ramen noodles, this little tiny, very lightweight packet packs in a whole lot of calories, and a whole lot of other things that no human being should ever eat. So retrospectively, my diet played a role in the fact that I got sick. Just as I think that the average American, we've all been through this pandemic together now. I think the reason, part of the reason so many Americans got sick is because our diet is absolutely dreadful, overall.

Diane: Your diet is not like that now? And probably when you came back from your adventure, you started to get back into the swing of things the way you generally lived your life, right?

Rita: More closely, but the challenge was I had so little energy, and I was living with family members, so, I was eating what they ate, which was, I think, better than the average bear, but certainly not the kind of food that I would eat now.

Now I go as much organic as I possibly can because I've learned how utterly, completely contaminated the food supply is in our grocery stores.

Diane: Well, going back to when you started to get sick again, you just kept going downhill? Did you end up in the hospital?

Rita: No. And I think it manifested, the ongoing illness manifested in my being tired. And my losing enthusiasm for the whole deal. But I could very easily say to myself, Rita, you've been hiking for five months. No wonder I was tired in some ways.

Diane: Did it occur to you that the Lyme disease had come back?

Rita: Not for a minute. I'd had the antibiotics. I thought I was done.

Diane: So you're finding all these other reasons connected to the actual hike?

Rita: And as a nurse, you trained, you get the medicine and you're done. And the doctor, when I saw him in the Er at the beginning of July, had said to me, we'll do a titer I'm pretty sure it will be negative because it's so soon after you finish the trail, get another titer done. So in September, I got another titer done, and it was positive. So, I went back on antibiotics. And three weeks later, at the end of that course, I wasn't feeling any better. And again, I'd heard people on the trail say, and there were people out there who had previously done the trail. And I'd heard them say it took me a couple of months before I started to feel good again. So, there's another reason why. So the next prescription was for Doxy for, like, five months. And at that point, before that was up, I called my doctor and said, hey, this isn't working. I'm not better. So then they sent me to an infectious disease doctor who looked at my labs and said, they're negative. You don't have Lyme. You've never had Lyme and took me off the antibiotics. And then I just slowly, inch by inch, cell by cell, fell apart until July. I hiked Mountain Monadnock one day, and the next day I couldn't move. And that's when I had my awakening. You know, Rita, this isn't chronic fatigue. This is Lyme. You've got Lyme. Then I started looking in Connecticut for docs who treated Lyme because that's where most of them — I moved into the Lyme literate world.

Diane: Were you still doing the trail after you'd had that first course of antibiotics?

Rita: Yeah.

Diane: And did you actually get to finish the trail?

Rita: Yes, I did.

Diane: So you did get to finish the trail, but toward the end of the trail, you were beginning to have those symptoms of fatigue and not feeling so great?

Rita: And it was only retrospectively that I looked back at how I was feeling on the last two or three weeks that I was hiking, that I went, yeah, you were relapsing then. You didn't know it, but you were relapsing at that point.

Diane: So, this whole Lyme disease experience kind of robbed you of your normal lifestyle for many years it did. You had other symptoms, too, didn't you?

Rita: I had had a disorder that created enormous pain in the right side of my face. It was a disorder I first had when I was about 38, 39. It's a disorder that traditional medicine says we can give you medicine, won't cure you won't cure you of all the symptoms, or you can have brain surgery that may or may not work, and it may not recur. Now, I believe that my adventure with that disorder started on December 7, 1941. I was a six-month fetus, and my mother learned about Pearl Harbor.. I was with her on 911. The very first thing she said, wearing that horrified, aghast expression that we all wore that day, she said this is just like Pearl Harbor. So, as I thought about that experience, what she told me with that statement was the amniotic fluid that I was paddling around in on December 6, got radically changed on December 7. Huge trauma. And I, as the fetus in that situation was absorbing all that pain, anger, hurt, fear. Then there was a breech birth, which was an absolute medical emergency. And then when I was two, I had a sister born who was hydrocephalic, and my parents knew that she was going to die at a very young age because there was nothing that they could do for kids in that. My hypothesis is partly from my disorder and partly for my sister Ruth's disorder is when they brought me home from the hospital, I was about 2 miles to the west of BIW, who was going 24/7, spewing God knows what toxins into the air, 2 miles to the west of me, with the naval air station also going 24/7, probably producing a different set of neurotoxins. So, at the time, my brain was developing and my nervous system was really in a high state of development there was all this neurotoxic stuff going on, to say nothing of all the stress and anxiety that my family was going through. My mother had three brothers in the war. So, there's all of that stuff going on, and doctors don't look that far back, but I would swear on the big stack of Bibles that those very early childhood experiences laid the groundwork for later on health challenges.

Diane: Is there a name for what it is that you have?

Rita: It's called trigeminal neurology. And years later, when I was in the Speakers Association, Bill Gold was the first President of the National Speakers Association. He grew up in Bath, Maine. He, too, had trigeminal neuralgia. And my older son, when he heard that, he said, what are they putting in the water up there?

Diane: Did the Lyme disease exacerbate that at all? Or it just happened to be concurrent, happening at the same time?

Rita: I don't think it helped it, shall we say. However, I had started rock climbing when I was in my, probably 32, 33, and a couple of times I had gone down to the Shawangunks in New York.

Diane: What's that?

Rita: It's in the Catskills outside of New York City. It's really close to Lyme, Connecticut. And that was before anybody knew about Lyme. That may well have been what triggered my having that face pain.

Diane: You finally, I guess, got rid of the Lyme, but did you have to rebuild yourself? And I mean now today at 80, I know you had the fall, but you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation that you were working towards this goal of hiking, walking, or swimming 5 miles every day.

Rita: No, it was hiking, walking, or running 5 miles. It was on my feet.

Diane: Okay, so you had this goal that you had set for yourself at the beginning of the year, and you were just trudging along and doing it, having a good time?

Rita: Yeah.

Diane: Until you fell. I'd like to talk about those goals. How do you go about at 75 and now 80 setting goals like that for yourself? Some people can barely walk from here to there.

Rita: And that breaks my heart because I think it's primarily lifestyle that leaves so many people in my age group incapacitated. I'm trying to think of some of the statistics about, I think it's 42% of American adults are overweight and 32% are obese. I mean, it's a huge percentage of people in this country that are walking around carrying too much weight. And unfortunately, now we know that fat isn't just fat, it's a storage depot for toxins that our bodies have to get out of circulation somewhere. I think it was back in 2012, the University of North Carolina did a study of metabolic health of Americans, and what they found was 12.2%, I think it was, it was just over 12% of Americans were metabolically healthy, as determined by cardiac measurements. So, no wonder when the pandemic came along a few years later, we were so vulnerable to that virus.

Diane: Have you had COVID?

Rita: I think I had it in January 2020.

Diane: Way back at the beginning?

Rita: Before we even knew what it was, I went to a meeting in Las Vegas, got to Logan Airport, and started losing my voice. And then a day or so later developed a cough. I didn't get sick, but one of the women that I traveled with got very, very

ill on that trip. Ended up ultimately being diagnosed with having COVID several months after which there was a skeptic in me, says how do they determine that?

Diane: Don't they look for antibodies?

Rita: But I don't think they do antibodies on her. This was January before anybody had heard of COVID, and then five months later, she got a letter saying, we had an expert look at your records, and you actually had COVID. Do they keep sputum specimens for five months? I don't know. But anyway, I don't have antibodies. I've not been sick. I was tested twice last fall because I had direct contact with somebody who had COVID. Two different people and I didn't pick it up.

Diane: How do you go about at your age, setting goals for yourself?

Rita: I have a process that I call inspiraction. Get inspired, take action. So as I was contemplating turning 80, I had an inspiration. I wonder if I could run a marathon. Well, why not try? So, I'm training for a marathon. Now I think, based on how the training is going, maybe this year I get to do a half marathon. But I love having goals, and I think that's the difference between me and a lot of other people my age. I have goals. They're meaningful. They give me a reason to get up in the morning. I have such fabulous health right now, and I have every intention of being healthier when I'm 85 than I am right now. And it does break my heart to see so many people in my age group who literally can't walk around the grocery store to buy their spaghetti, which I wouldn't eat, by the way. But again, if I ruled the world, you would not be able to graduate from high school without being able to read a food label. I mean, how many Americans know that 95% of the bread that's on the shelves gets sprayed with glyphosate, aka Roundup, just before harvest? And the reason they do that is because it doesn't break the harvesting machines down. It weakens the plant.

Diane: So tell me what you eat in a typical day.

Rita: If I am eating bread, I have a couple of keto breads that I make with almond flour. Organic almond flour. There's a new store in Brunswick that has an organic-like sprouted seed bread that's absolutely wonderful. Certainly, one of the things I need to do right now is get back more vegetables.

Diane: Do you grow your own vegetables?

Rita: I grow some. Not enough to get me through the winter for sure. But my family also has vegetables growing on the farm, so it's easier to get fresh vegetables. One goal for me is to start going to the farmer's market more often. I think it's really important for us to support small farmers.

Diane: As we support our bodies.

Rita: Absolutely.

Diane: Since your fall, you're still working toward this marathon or half marathon goal?

Rita: I ran a 5K on May 21.

Diane: How did that feel?

Rita: Tears in my eyes when I drove away because I spent a lot of really happy hours in the race scene, and it was so wonderful to have been back there. I am scheduled to run a fiver on July 4.

Diane: I'm sort of flabbergasted. I mean, February, what was the date? It was early February, February 13, that you fell? How long did it take you to get back to even doing your daily routine?

Rita: I think it was a couple of weeks because one of the signs of the concussion that I sustained was fatigue. So, fortunately, one of my coping mechanisms is reading. I can read happily for a long, long time, frequently and often, but I think I was back walking within a couple of weeks.

Diane: Some people with a concussion, they find that it's difficult to read. Their eyes can't track the words the way they used to. Did you have any kind of brain fog or any of those issues?

Rita: I did for a while. I don't now. And again, these breakthrough stem cell activators that I use, I absolutely know they had a lot to do with my rapid recovery.

Diane: And in terms of your knowing when your body was ready to get out and do more, you know your body well enough to know, okay, today's the day I can walk this far or try to walk this far?

Rita: And I think the other thing is, you know your body well enough, and your body says, hey, Rita, we're not doing this today. You say, okay, we're not doing this today.

Diane: This goal that you had, you were raising money for the Good Shepherd Food Bank, correct? Second year in a row that you've done that?

Rita: Yes.

Diane: And did you have to put the goal aside for this year?

Rita: That goal got put aside for this year. I still am passionately committed to people having enough food and healthy food, because how can we have a

healthy community, a healthy city, state, country if people are eating really bad food?

Diane: So, you've got a lot of things that you are passionate about, and they don't just concern what's happening in your own body? You're concerned about the welfare of a lot of people, everybody. In addition to pursuing your personal goals, you're also trying to pursue goals with a larger sense of meaning.

Rita: Yes. And that comes right out of the childhood experience of hearing people say and witnessing the truth of a rising tide floats all boats. An ebbing tide sinks all boats or lowers all boats, too. When we look back at those pictures from space, we are all on one very small boat here. And so what I do does impact people around me. And one of the things I hear a lot, people will say, you inspire me, and that's good. But my favorite word is inspiration. I want people to see me and get inspired and then take action to improve their own lives.

Diane: I expect people will be inspired by listening to you right now. I hope so.

Rita: I hope so, too.

Diane: You inspire me. And I love your term inspirational.

Rita: If the language doesn't have a word, make one up.

Diane: Right. So your next goal is 5 miles on July 4. You've got something else up your sleeve, too. A project that you're doing with a gentleman by the name of Shawn Shambo. You're going to be doing things that even much younger people would say, no way am I ever going to do that. You, two did something recently. What was it?

Rita: We, on Memorial Day, we went whitewater rafting up at Three Rivers on the Kennebec. It was an absolutely extraordinarily wonderful day. Shawn's purpose for that day was to sort of chase it out. And the intention is to find eight people who are 80 or older who are in good shape, who want to have some adventures. Sean's goal is ultimately there is a Netflix or a Prime video series about people over 80 who are living rich, full, healthy, happy, contributive lives. How cool is that?

Diane: Well, I don't know, but maybe we'll find somebody. Somebody will listen to this podcast episode and I will send them to you.

Rita: Absolutely, please do, because it's interesting, I had an insight after asking a friend I used to do triathlons with that this population of people we're looking for may be so busy they don't have time to stop what they're doing to come and play with us.

Diane: So, you went whitewater rafting. What are some of the other adventures that you guys are thinking about?

Rita: Doing a ropes course. Another one is skydiving. Now that's the one that kind of raises my stress level a little bit. But I'm figuring the compensation as they hook me up to a really good-looking young man who takes over the decision to step out of the plane, I'm okay.

Diane: You're funny. You've got a great sense of humor and I think you don't take yourself too seriously. Your goals are serious goals, yes, but you don't sit and ruminate about, oh, my gosh, I don't know. should I do this or should I not do that? You just sort of feel that this would be a fun, worthwhile thing to do.

Rita: And that brings me to how I created the word inspiraction. I was doing triathlons, mostly the Olympic Distance, mile Swim, 25 miles bike, 10K run, and I could pretty much tell you, unless I fell off my bike, what time I was going to finish on each course. I was out biking one day, and this question popped up in my mind. I wonder if you could do an Iron Man? And I quickly popped that question back down and ignored it, but the question wouldn't go away. It just kept

recurring and finally, I just said, guess I'll sign up for one, that's the only way I'm going to find out. And it was after that experience, and after actually accomplishing that goal that I realized that I had been inspired to do that and then I had taken action. And on some level, there was no reason to think that Rita Losee could do an Iron Man. But I got inspired and I took action and son of a gun, I did it.

Diane: I think we should end on that note unless you want to share some final words of inspiraction for whoever's listening.

Rita: That's a big assignment, isn't it. But I think the idea is, all of us, whether we're two or 102, have more potential, more capacity, more ability to accomplish things and to make a difference on this planet than most of us are willing to acknowledge. And as I look around this planet, we have a lot of problems. We need a lot of help. We need all hands on deck. So, that's my invitation. You may not want to do a triathlon or a road race, but maybe you could just help somebody who lives in your neighborhood. All of us can do that.

Diane: Well thank you Rita Losee.

Rita: And thank you, Diane Atwood. You are a sister of mine in so many ways.

Diane: Well, I hope that you have a delightful, inspirational day today.

Rita: Likewise. Thank you very, very much.

Diane: That brings us to the end of this episode of the Catching Your Memories podcast. Many thanks to Rita Losee for sharing her life with us. If you'd like to learn more about the adventure project for people over 80, you can connect directly with Rita at [rhlosee@gmail.com](mailto:rhlosee@gmail.com) that's [rhlosee@gmail.com](mailto:rhlosee@gmail.com) send me an email – [diane@dianeatwood.com](mailto:diane@dianeatwood.com) and I'll pass it along to Rita.

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This podcast was created, produced, recorded, and edited by me ... Diane Atwood. Catching Your Memories — The interview of a lifetime.