

COLLEGE THE SECOND TIME AROUND

By Claire Yezbak Fadden, Associate Editor



BOOMERS RETURN TO SCHOOL WITH NEW GOALS AND RENEWED ENERGY

Someone once told Jackie Anderson to follow her passion, not her pension. Those words brought inspiration and helped fuel a decision to quit her job in the Zoological Society of San Diego's marketing department. At 45, she enrolled in Cuyamaca/Grossmont College's graphic design program and pursued her creative passion. Today, her workdays are filled with designing ads, programs and print layouts for the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

"I liked the marketing aspects of my job as executive secretary at the Zoo," Anderson, now 53, recalls, "especially the advertising and design process. But I wanted to do something more creative, something that would let me freelance and maybe even work out of my house." With her husband, Chris, encouraging her, Anderson took an art class at night to see if this was really what she wanted to do as a career. Months later, the couple began putting in place a plan to make her dream job a reality. "I am so glad I made the change. As stressful as it can be at times, I really enjoy working on projects and having deadlines," she says, "and then being able to see my finished work in print or on the web."

BACK TO SCHOOL

Many boomers like Anderson are headed back to the classroom to study art, creative writing and other long-forgotten interests that were abandoned in their 20s and 30s in exchange for a more financially secure career. "They have regrets that when they were younger they didn't pursue these passions," says David Bohl, creator of slowdownfast.com, a website devoted to supporting people to change their lives.

"Now after years of working and becoming successful, they're able to go after those other interests. And the amazing thing," Bohl adds, "is that this time around, they're able to let go of any expectations or outcomes. Many of them aren't enrolling in classes as a means to an end," says the lifestyle mentor, educator and author. "And often, because these are hard-working individuals, they come out of the experience with an entirely new career path. A career they never had planned on and one that affords them a paycheck."

CAREERS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In a recent poll, 80 percent of those over the age of 50 say that they plan to work past their traditional retirement age. Most intend to find new jobs with a higher social purpose and more flexible hours. "Their idea of retirement is different," says Saskia Knight, vice chancellor for enrollment and student affairs at Chapman University College in Orange. "Many of our students are planning their retirement to include a second career, a career that reflects their strong commitment to give back and make a difference." Of their nearly 6,000 students, 27 percent of Chapman's undergrad and graduate students are boomer-age. "Many of our adult students have come back to college to get a teaching credential or become licensed in marriage and family therapy," she says. "Both of these fields benefit from maturity and life experience. This time around, the career decision is fueled by something other than a large paycheck."

FOLLOWING YOUR PASSION

Joel Orner, 68, is a real life example. Five years ago, Orner worked as a sales manager for a major banking institution. His clients were trust funds and escrow

accounts with deposits equaling several million dollars. Today, as the executive chef for the Los Angeles Yacht Club, Orner is more interested in the cost of lamb shanks than the going interest rates for large depositors.

"I always loved cooking. In fact that's how I spent my weekends," Orner says. "I found fine dining fascinating." After he retired, Orner worked as a banking consultant. "It took me about six months before I realized that I wanted to explore my love of cooking. I'd do catering for friends, but I knew that I wanted to have the full education." So, at 64, Orner enrolled in the California School of Culinary Arts in Pasadena. "I have to tell you it was a real challenge," he jokes. "Cooking School isn't easy. It was tough for someone my age. Those 23-year-olds could remember things a lot more easily. I had to work harder compared to the young kids." But after waiting for his chance for so long, Orner wasn't deterred. He brought his life experience and an appreciation for being able to work in a field he had loved for so long with him into the classroom. It didn't take long for his fellow students to tap into his enthusiasm and willingness to learn. He still mentors students from the school.

What advice does Orner have for boomers looking to change careers? "Follow your passion. Just do what you love to do and the rest will follow." Bohl concurs. "All you need is a desire to reverse engineer yourself to determine what's most important to you—your beliefs, attitudes and values—and to act on those desires."

"Don't be afraid to fail," adds Anderson. "Think about what makes you happy. Make your plan and then go for it."*

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