

# John T Transcript

**WE TALK ABOUT WORK, LANGUAGES, SERENDIPITY AND GETTING MARRIED AGAIN.**

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**Preston:**

So you were talking about the podcasts you listen to to religiously and Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me was on the list. What else?

**John**

Lexicon Valley, a podcast about language hosted by John McWhorter a linguistics professor at Columbia has some amazing knowledge of the world's languages. Always interesting. This American Life I listen to almost every week. Just listened to that one today. That and the Gist, I usually listen to them while doing chores or while driving or walking. Something that is mindless, I can't concentrate on a podcast if I'm trying to do any other kind of work.

**Preston**

I've gotten to the point where I can't multitask very well anymore.

**John**

But I don't listen to them while riding the bike. I don't put headphones in while riding the bike.

**Preston**

And you ride a lot, John?

**John**

Not not as much as I should. On the other hand, if I don't ride then I walk because we don't own a car.

**Preston**

Okay,

**John**

by choice, something that I never imagined,

**Preston**

Which is one of the questions I asked you when we started talking about the podcast is what surprised you about getting older and the fact that you were able to get rid of your car?

**John**

Well, that was a bit of a surprise. We got rid of the cars because we moved to France for a year. And we lived in a small, small to medium sized city where we could walk or take the bus. If we wanted to travel we'd rent a car. So when we returned here, we thought we would try to do the same thing. And it's worked out, the bus system here is not as good, but it's functional. I use it quite a bit. I walk around our neighborhood, walk to the grocery store. In fact, it seems to me the distance from my house to the grocery store is almost exactly the same as it was in France.

**Preston**

So we live in a European city right?

**John**

A European style community in the sense that it's walkable for almost all your needs. You can bus through the rest of Austin relatively easily.

**Preston**

The idea of the podcast is Growing Older We're trying to get a lot of different people, not just old people, but people of all ages to talk about some of the things that they found out when they got older things that you looked forward to when you were working and they either came true or didn't when you got older and quit working, because you are retired now, aren't you, John?

**John**

I'm retired yes, and I don't miss working. I enjoyed my job. I worked at the same place for 27 years. And I never minded going to work, but I was also continually busy outside of work. And stopping working has just given me more time to be more continually busy at any number of things, so I haven't had a moment's boredom since I retired and really never, never regretted it. And don't miss it.

**Preston**

What what's your age next birthday, John?

**John**

I'll be 68.

**Preston**

Okay, so how long have you been retired?

**John**

I retired in 2015.

**Preston**

Okay

**John**

So four years, a little over four years.

**Preston**

Now you're working on a second marriage?

**John**

Yes. I've been married for (pause) since 2016. However, Connie, and I've been together since 2003. We didn't marry because we didn't live in the same city and I had adolescent and teenage children at home, felt it better to let that go for the moment. And then finally, after my kids got out of high school, it was the youngest one. I popped the question.

**Preston**

And she said?

**John**

Obviously, yes, you win. So it's really been a long term relationship.

**Preston**

I think I heard you say it one time and y'all knew each other when you were in your other marriages. And that you were friends for a long time.

**John**

Yes, We've been friends since 1973 and her first husband was one of my best friends in college. I didn't have to get to know her that although, of course, when you live with someone they're always adjustment.

**Preston**

Yeah.

**John**

You asked me what surprised me about growing old and I thought of something and then I'd forgotten it and then I remember that this morning. When I was at about age 40. Looking back at age 20, I realized that I was a much wiser person, and not so much wiser about life or marriage or anything philosophical, but just wiser in the ways of the world, not so apt to be taken in or misled or fooled. A healthy amount of skepticism, having much more experience, seeing the way the world works, and I thought then at age 40, that by the age 60 I would have completed that journey that I would be beyond I would have enough experience to not make mistakes that could have been avoided. And it surprised me that to some degree that that is not true.

**Preston**

Didn't didn't happen.

**John**

I am always amused and frustrated at the same time when I make head slapping mistake and say, I should have known that would happen. It was obvious. I still do those things and that's somewhat of a surprise.

**Preston**

I like to think that it's because we're doing so many things that you just slip. You don't make those kind of mistakes if you're sitting.

**John**

Well, that's a good point.

**Preston**

So what do you do for exercise, John besides ride a bike occasionally.

**John**

I walk a lot. Right now that's about all of it. But it's not uncommon for me to make 10 or 15 thousand steps in a day.

**Preston**

Okay.

**John**

Just walking around the neighborhood of course we meet twice a week to walk around the park couple times and that if I do that plus go on one trip to the grocery store or somewhere else in the neighborhood, I'll make my daily quota of steps. I need to exercise more clearly.

**Preston**

So have you gained weight as you gotten older?

**John**

I all my life my weight has yo-yoed although not sort of over the long term. I go between 160 and 190 pounds over a cycle of five to 10 years it seems. Living in France for a year put me on the upside of that schedule because we really did not deny ourselves any of the pleasures of living in France and in spite of my best efforts to continue walking and running I still wound up gaining 30 pounds

**Preston**

Wow. Am I correct in remembering that you speak pretty good French.

**John**

Yes, I speak fluent French. I speak very good Italian and I have a middling ability in Spanish.

**Preston**

Really easy for you to learn or do you really have to work at that?

**John**

Language was always easy for me. I don't know why but it was. One of my regrets is not ... that I did not continue learning other languages, in particular, non Indo-European languages. I wish I had spent some time learning Arabic or Japanese or Chinese although it's not too late to start.

**Preston**

My my late wife's grandmother started taking Arabic at 92. She said "I just need something to do." I was in awe of somebody at 92 taking a new language and a tough language.

**John**

Yes, it is difficult. I took class in Arabic. When I lived in Paris one year when I was a young man, I needed to enroll in the university in order to get the student discount card ID card. So I did enroll, and I took a class in Arabic, but class met at night, once a week, and there were over 100 students in it. So it was virtually useless as classes go,

**Preston**

But you got your discount card.

**John**

I did get the discount card.

**Preston**

Okay

**John**

At a very reasonable price.

**Preston**

What was your degree in John.

**John**

I have a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in French. I was enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Texas here in Austin, but I dropped out of it after the master's degree. Job

prospects didn't look very good in 1977. A boom in language learning after Sputnik starting in 58 and that peaked in the early 70s. Large numbers of PhD students in modern languages had graduated and filled up the universities. There were very few positions that remained.

**Preston**

And the government wasn't hiring all those people.

**John**

The government probably would have hired someone of my ability, but I had no interest in working for the government in the 1970s in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, working for the government didn't I had a jaundiced view of working for the government. So I never tried to interview with the State Department, much less CIA.

**Preston**

Did you serve in the military, john?

**John**

No, no, my father did, but I did not. I had a student deferment. The class that matriculated in 1970 was the last class to receive student deferments but as long as we kept up our good grades. As full time students. We couldn't be drafted.

**Preston**

But that was a period of time for. We were right in the middle of that and the Bay of Pigs, and all that kind of stuff going on. So yeah, it's a interesting time of the United States. So what do you want to do, John, where do you go from here?

**John**

I have never been very good at plotting a course well into the future, I wound up leaving graduate school and working in construction trades a couple years of that caused me to go back to school. I learned computer programming while in the graduate business school and discovered that I that I was good at that as I had been at language, I found it easy to learn. So I stumbled into a job where a software company needed a programmer who could speak French and that led gradually to, well I got laid off from that job after four years and then wound up in Houston working for and with a friend of mine in the Information Technology Department for Harris County, and I was there for 27 years, as I mentioned. So all of that happened almost by accident. Things ... I found that in my life, if I prepared for the future, then the future would happen and that I had very little say in exactly how it would happen, but it did happen. it wound up being, perhaps not the life I would have written for myself, but it's one I don't look back on with any regret. And I feel that way about the future now, that I don't know exactly what I will do or what will happen in my life. But I feel like by continuing to be socially active, physically active, mentally active, that the future will be equally bright.

**Preston**

And do you feel like you prepared to handle life as it comes along?

**John**

Yes, there are always financial questions. I can't complain ... the place that I worked had one of the few remaining fully funded pension programs left in the country. So I'm, I will have income until I die. Social security is a supplement. Right now, if I were to have to be put in a nursing home tomorrow, I feel like my income would cover it. If I were there for 20 years. I don't know. I guess it's hard to predict what the future will bring financially. But for the moment, I feel like we can handle whatever comes.

**Preston**

You got all your paperwork done for End of Life?

**John**

That ... No!

**Preston**

Okay.

**John**

And that is a concern. Well, we know we need to do it and we keep saying let's do that, you know, one of the most important things I could do for my wife in case I meet with ill fortune that would be to just give her the password to my phone, which contains my password application that would give her all my passwords. I still haven't done that.

**Preston**

Why not, John?

**John**

Just procrastination.

**Preston**

Okay.

**John**

It's something I've been afflicted by all my life.

**Preston**

it will get better, right?

**John**

It may not get better, but with with friends like you to remind us of these things, we'll get that taken care of.

**Preston**

And so we don't have those papers done, and we keep saying, you know, we really ought to do that. And the answer is, yeah, we really ought to do that. One of my good friends and I think, you know him, is Doug Ballew. He was out riding on his mountain bike, yesterday afternoon, jumping things. He went down, twisted his ankle into the bike, broke it in three places. You never know. You know, it's really time to make this stuff work. We're going to get done. So You know, hope you have a chance to get it done. It's it's amazing when I ask people our age, have you got all that paperwork in place? And the answer is yeah we're going to do that. Are your parents alive?

**John**

No, my father died eight years ago. My mother died 20 years ago.

**Preston**

Wow.

**John**

She died at the age of 71. Only a few years older than I am now.

**Preston**

We don't have a parents to worry about, you know, are there relatives. I just had a discussion with a guy who's elderly relative is getting scammed getting phone calls, say "hey, I can help you." "Oh, really great". How can you know kind of thing. I don't have any of those either. And my kids are both gonna be fine. It looks like and they know they're not gonna get anything from me. My life is fairly simple from that standpoint.

**John**

Yes, I only have one, there's only one relative left from my parents generation. I have an uncle who's only six years older than I am. Then he just recently retired he lives in Lubbock and his wife is ill with advancing dementia sad to see, and I hope I never have to deal with that.

**Preston**

Either dealing with someone who has it or personally dealing with it.

**John**

Or being that person,

**Preston**

Right.

**John**

People in my family generally on both sides live to be so somewhere in the 80s. I've always said I wanted to make it to 2035 when I'll be 83 and that is the year of the Texas Bicentennial. I'd like to be around to tell children what it was like in the old days.

**Preston**

Back in the old days. So what advice have you got for somebody who's starting thinking about retiring, looking, looking to the future and say, okay, where am i going from here? What would what one thing John jumps out? You say? Boy, I wish I knew that. I wish somebody had told me that.

**John**

That's a hard question. I have to admit, I did not understand how Medicare and Social Security work. I had very little knowledge and it seems like revelations, pleasant revelations and unpleasant revelations have occurred almost monthly over the last three or four years about how that all works. So I might advise you to learn as much as you can about Medicare and Social Security.

**Preston**

I was talking to somebody the other day and they say the only thing that keeps me going is the Affordable Care Act. And I was kind of "what?" But they were able to sign up under the Affordable Care Act and get insurance it has made a huge difference in their life as they've had medical issues.

**John**

Yes. Well, it's a sad fact of life in this country that not everyone has medical insurance, which I feel is very uncivilized of us.

**Preston**

Yeah.

**John**

I have been very fortunate in that, my former employer continues to insure me as a secondary insurance, so I don't have to have Medicare supplemental, my drug costs are covered. But my wife, for example, was on one plan last year and her prescriptions were fairly expensive. The plan was not it was fairly expensive. And the prescriptions were fairly expensive. Now she's on a different plan. That's not only cheaper, but she pays on nothing for the drug. How, how can this be?

**Preston**

And how do you figure it out?

**John**

And how do you figure it out? It's almost impossible to make the right choice the first time because you just don't understand all the different requirements, all the different possibilities. You almost have to learn a second language to read the...

**Preston**

So you're going to start classes on this John?

**John**

Someone should, I'm sure someone does. But we we made a large error when we got married and that we did not put my wife on my insurance.

**Preston**

Mm hmm.

**John**

Because she had her own insurance. I did not understand that when she reached age 65 her insurance would go away entirely go away and she would be on Medicare, solely on Medicare. So I did not insist that she go on my insurance for various reasons. It was not a lot of insisting on anything and our relationship still isn't.

**Preston**

Okay.

**John**

We realize now that that was a mistake, you know that we had a one year window to put her on my insurance now we can't do it

**Preston**

So, is your health good? Pretty much?

**John**

My health is reasonably good.

**Preston**

Cuz we talked a lot about medical insurance and all that kind of stuff. I had been very blessed with good health, I'm 76 now and take three minor pills every day.

**John**

Yes, I have high blood pressure and high cholesterol. I have thyroid problems, but those are all essentially treatable by drugs and so far so good. Chronic arthritis and both my hands feel like at some point I'll I may need this some sort of gripper use tool pick things up. Now, not now.

**Preston**

Anything else John, we're getting to the point where it's probably time to wrap this podcast up. What did what did we forget?

**John**

I don't know, I feel like I've been boring it. But

**Preston**

Let me talk a little bit about that because part of what we want to do is have people who listen to this to hear the things that you've you missed coming along. Like I didn't understand Medicare I didn't understand those kind of things. I wish I'd known better it would have saved me some money, I could have gotten my wife on my insurance, it would have saved us a lot of money. So that's the big thing. And you know, can we be boring yeah, hell yeah, we can be boring. But the big thing is we can put stuff out there where people hear it and say, you know, I probably ought to deal with that I'm probably gonna do something about and that's, that's our objective in this podcast is just to make make people are coming along and haven't had the chance to live for 68 years to give them some guidance if they want to take it, you know, and if they don't want to take it Okay, that's fine too. We've had a good time talking. And I appreciate you.

**John**

Thank you. Yeah. Its been fun

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