

Ani Colt, Preston “Ty” Tyree, Co Hosts with Michele Golding, Guest

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Ani

Michelle, thank you so much for being here.

Michele

My pleasure.

Ani

I remember when we met so clearly in front of the ice cream store, Licks and that, that connection we felt, and I still do. So it's a special pleasure for me to sit here and talk to you on our Growing Old(er) podcast. So one of the questions Preston, or Ty, as I call him, really likes to ask is what has surprised you or what is surprising you about growing older?

Michele

Well, particularly. there's nothing about growing older that is anything like I planned, hoped or expected. It's not at all what I visualized.

Ani

Why don't you give me an idea of what you visualized?

Michele

Well to begin with, I was an athlete as ... my entire life. So I expected to be physically fit and I expected to work until I chose not to. I expected to have the financial security that came from having a good career. So I expected to have the savings, I expected to have a home, I expected to have possibly a vacation home or the ability to have a some type of vacation plan that allowed me to go to different vacation spots every year, so that I could travel. And I expected to be in the same place and have the same social set of friends that I had when I was working. And I expected to have the body that enabled me to do those things. And I expected to still be competing at a higher age level but still be competing to some degree.

So I was looking forward to that. And then I expected to have an independence and more free time but an independence that I really don't have so that independence looked like it. It was not just an emotional independence but a physical independence or financial independence but an independence that I don't really have. Right now I'm financially dependent on my brothers and I'm physically dependent on walking apparatus or or some kind of medical equipment and on drugs and on surgical procedures and I'm psychologically dependent on my own ability to constantly monitor my state of mind. So it just doesn't look like I expected it to look. And in therefore the activities that I'm involved in aren't what I expected.

That doesn't mean I'm not happy. But it just doesn't look like I expected it to look.

Ani

As an athlete, I imagine there was a mind game that you learned. Has that mind game helped you with this lack of independence and how you handled it, handle it?

Michele

No, I don't think so. It ... I actually separated myself from all that for a long time. I was so depressed that I kind of withdrew from all that night. I didn't see a way of competing with it. But I struggled through the depression and I sought help but that didn't seem to help.

What finally did work was to spend time focusing on gratitude in nature. So I decided I would just focus on what I could be grateful for every day. I was, even if I had to be grateful for the same things every day I decided to write down three things to be grateful for. And often I wrote down the same three things and just spend as much time out nature as I could. And lots of times I just wrote down that I was grateful to be out in nature, but I think I turned away from the

tennis and because I felt the loss so deeply and the people that I had been involved with the loss of those, that socio economic level, that those friendships and the bonds right formed, the income, the travel, everything associated with it.

For a long time I couldn't even watch, watch it on TV, but eventually my life turned around and by being grateful I learned that I could be happy, and I ended up waking up happy every day and I and I am although I just never thought my life would be look the way it does.

Ani

That's profound. And I take it to heart for myself.

What is your life like now?

Michele

Well, now instead of ... well being a tennis pro first playing for a living, you're entertaining but you're playing for yourself. But that didn't last a long time. But the coaching, the teaching, managing clubs, the involvement with people, that's a giving situation. So, because it's not always a tangible thing, like when you go to the store and you bring home a steak that's fairly tangible or you go to the store and you bring home a pair of pants or a blouse. That's a tangible thing. But when you go to get a tennis lesson, it's hard to take that home and put it in a drawer.

So being that it's less tangible. It's harder to make it seem meaningful, but I spent a lot of time giving to people on a deeper level than just a tennis lesson. So it was about connecting with people. So my life now is about connecting with people without giving the tennis lesson. And so as I walk and I'm outside and I spend time in nature I spend as much time walking as I can. I try to give as many people as I can a smile, because not everybody gets those. And I try to interact with as many people as I can and give them something tangible, like a hug or a smile, or a conversation that they might not be getting, or an ear that they may not be getting from someone else, just a connection and try to improve the lives of everybody I connect with. It's not the same as I did in my career, but it's still an opportunity to give to people. And it's consistent with my belief in why I believe we as human beings are here on the earth.

I think it's about relationship that we're different from trees and dogs and cats and plants because we can communicate and relate and that that's what we're supposed to do.

Ani

I experience good eye contact with you. And I had this curious thought that when you're playing tennis, you really have to watch the ball and your opponent. Do you think those skills that you picked up or the the habit or whatever you would call it in tennis is acting out and how you relate to people now?

Michele

Well, I just know that ... I know that very few people pay attention when you talk to them. And that very few people when they say "Hi, how are you?" really mean it? It's just like an empty statement. And I spent so many years not feeling well, that I realized when I finally felt better, and someone said, "Hi, how are you?" And I could say, "better thanks" that no one really paid attention, but I really meant it. So I wanted that to be meaningful. But I wanted the words that passed between me and other people to be meaningful. And I wanted people to know that I was paying attention. So when I would say to someone, "Hi, how are you?" And they would say whatever they would say, I'd ask about that. And I'd want them to know that whatever they were saying I was really paying attention to. And I'd say, "Well, no, I'll really listen. If you want

to complain, I will listen.” Because a lot of people will say, well, it doesn't pay to complain, because no one listens. People often say that to you. But I'll say, “No, I'll listen. You know, I maybe can't do anything, but I can sure listen, and maybe it'll make you feel better or maybe I can make a suggestion.”

So all those things make a difference.

Ani

Listening, in some ways, does seem like a lost art.

Or something that's not emphasized enough in our culture. And I certainly agree with “Hi how are you” kind of thing even when we're walking, or more likely on our trikes, it's amazing how many people don't even make. It's like they don't even notice you going on the sidewalk or on the street. And it feels like a disconnect.

I appreciate connection. It sounds like connection is important to you, too.

Michele

Oh, yes.

Ani

Tell me about that.

Michele

Well, I think from the time we're very young, that's an important thing to be noticed or to be as a child, you know, a child wants to be recognized. And

I think that we're ... if you are in a situation where you're trying to help children, I think we now understand that if we mirror that child's requests or whatever it is they're looking for that that helps that child recognize that they're being recognized. So that mirroring concept is helpful in all relationships, and particularly with children or in marriages or it's now being taught in relationship, but it's particularly, I think, with children. And so I think that that's part of being recognized. I think it's, everyone needs it.

Preston

Michelle, I'd like to get a little context going here. Give us a little background. Where'd you grow up? How old are you? Where'd you go to school? Those kinds of things, just so we have a feel for and how do we put this together and in the world

Michele

Well, I grew up one year at a time. Like most people

Preston

One day at a time.

Michele

Yeah, one day at a time. My dad was a salesman, and I was born in Chicago lived there five months. Then we moved to New Orleans. We moved around a lot. I think by the time I got on tour, which was 1973, I think I counted that I had moved 17 times.

Somewhere along the line I counted 17 moves, but that was my own not my family's but my own. I don't see it as a bad thing. But it happened a lot.

I started playing tennis when I was 11. Before that I swam competitively for a few years. I was always a tomboy. But Title Nine didn't happen until 1972. And I went to college I played for University of Iowa, then transferred to University of Illinois. I played tennis at both schools. I transferred to Illinois because I had a boyfriend there. I didn't go to major in my Mrs. But I was not horribly connected to my studies, but I was mostly interested in Tennis.

But it was before women ever dreamed of being professional athletes. It was just not in my consciousness. Girls didn't have that possibility. It didn't exist. The number 8 or 10 player in the world, at that time made when I was on tour made maybe \$10,000 in prize money. You can't live on that, you can't travel on that income. So when I joined the Virginia Slims in 73 that was about two months after the movie battle of the sexes. That were Bobby Riggs played Billie Jean King. I knew that all the people involved in that and the the guy that was supposedly the manager of Bobby Riggs that was really his name's Lorne Kuhle and he was really Bobby Riggs's son Larry's, best friend. So Larry Riggs and Lorne Kuhle were best friends. And Lorne Kuhlwas a friend of mine. I knew from playing Junior tennis, he was older than I was, but I knew him from traveling tournaments. And ... but that was my era of tennis. So it pretty much told what my life was about. You didn't make money. You couldn't afford to support yourself unless you had a sponsor. And it was the endorsements where people made money.

The best players got their money under the table. And that was the very top, maybe five or six players. And the rest of the players had to do something else or they were wealthy, or they had money on the side from something else that came from. They had friends of the family or someone else to give them money. One of my closest friends, Tracy Austin's, sister, Pam, she was dating Peter Revson from the Revlon company, till he was in a car crash. He was a race car driver. That's where she got her money. Then as soon as he crashed and died, you know, she didn't have the money to travel. But that's where people got their money in 1975 that was the biggest prize money to date in women's tennis and it was the Family Circle Cup at Hilton Head. I think Rosie Casells won it was \$35,000 that just wasn't big money.

Ani & Preston

So what were the guys making at the time?

Michele

Probably \$100,000 or more

Preston

at a tournament

Michele

in a tournament. I don't I don't remember exactly, but it was a lot more money.

\$100,000 or \$250,000

Ani

that's a lot of money back then.

Michele

Oh, absolutely 1975

Ani

We ...What year were you born? I like to ask it that way versus how old are you?

Michele

1949

Ani

1949

Michele

and at that point I had to win three rounds to make \$75. So there were the main draw had 32 people in it. There were a couple of preliminary rounds before you got to the main draw and

you didn't make any money till you got to the main draw. I also did the pro celebrity tournament, they paid me \$75, \$50 or \$75 to play in that. And then I would give a clinic with Billie Jean King and a couple other players, and the clinic was free to people who paid to come to it. And that was put on by Touch of Sweden by Dow Chemical that made Touch of Sweden hand lotion, and a suntan lotion. And at that time, Dow Chemical was also making napalm in Vietnam for Vietnam. So and we were being sponsored by Virginia Slims a cigarette company. So the whole time, you're, we would go to the union meetings. And we would be saying here we are supported by a cigarette company and we're athletes. We're being sponsored by a company that makes napalm for Vietnam. And what are we going to do? So it was really tough for ... to be a women, professional, female athlete, but that was the only game. And it's still not that easy because Avon sponsors most of the professional athletes now and they kind of have a monopoly and there's still issues today. Other issues, but there's still issues across all the sports. It's still not been solved.

Ani

Just as an aside, I went to the Virginia Slims tournament in Washington DC once, for business, because I was working for the ad agency for the yellow glasses that they were promoting, the Arther Ashe glasses. I think they call them

Michele

To be able to see more clearly.

Ani

Yes, yes, yes. I had lunch next to Chris Everts.

Michele

Billie Jean was before Chris.

Ani

Yes. Yeah, Billie Jean was. Anyhow It was a very fascinating thing to go and have just that little bit insight in it. I it is striking that it was by Virginia Slims a cigarette company, only people. Almost everyone smoked back then.

Let me ask you. We call this podcast grow. Growing Old(er) , and I want to talk to you about the part where you consider your growing. How do you consider yourself growing?

Michele

Now?

Ani

Yes.

Michele

Well, today my growth is more educational, because I'm learning about the medical side of the issues I'm dealing with, which are rheumatoid arthritis, which is not fatal but not curable.

I was on chemo for seven years which they used to treat rheumatoid arthritis when it's reached a certain stage but I was never in remission from it. So I'm no longer using any kind of chemo. So the disease is pretty much going untreated. which we've decided is a better way then putting chemo in my body and not knowing what that's doing in addition to not helping me.

So I have the ... with the rheumatoid arthritis and I have osteoporosis, which is causing a lot of issues because I've had five fractures in seven months so and Medicare's not paying for the drugs I need to be on. So I'm dealing with Medicare and working, working on that. So there's a

lot of Learning, not just about the particular legal issues, and medical issues and laws, but the political issues and how to get around all of that or how to work within the system, how to go around the system.

It's a full time job and learning about insurances or how to use the system, how it works against you. And then doctors, just trying to find doctors because so many, there are good doctors and bad doctors and knowledgeable doctors. You know, the doctor who graduated it is at the bottom of his class. Doc called doctor and I've had a lot of bad doctors so it's very difficult. So I would say a lot of my time is spent on medical issues.

Part of my time is spent just on trying to get moving. Every day I wake up and it takes me a couple hours to get the juice going in my joints. And then to try to physically go out and I try to try to walk because that gets me out with people. It makes me feel or allows me to feel more like the athlete I used to be and the person I used to be, and it allows me to overdo which I'm allows me to be the person I used to be, which is how to abuse my body, which is beyond use it but abuse it.

So I try to walk eight miles a day. And potentially that allows me to connect with people. And when you're focusing on other people, it's much better than focusing on yourself. And the more you can focus on other people and help other people that it's you know, a positive thing in your own life, it just helps you as well as helping other people.

So the other part of growth is finding avenues.

Like the senior group, I think spreading the word about what exists here in Miller, about the seniors about the but particularly about the group and about the friends people can meet. I always try to push that to anybody I meet about what's available and how to connect. I think that's the important thing is so that people don't isolate.

Ani

Are you speaking about Wisdom|crew group .

Michele

Yes, yes, I am.

Ani

So, we're gonna finish up here but it occurs to me to ask you this. You were a coach and a tennis pro and taught people with this wealth of experience although some of it is very difficult about how to deal with the health system, you might teach that.

Michele

I'm not very good at that. I mean, I haven't learned to deal with it. And truthfully, I don't find it very interesting.

Ani

Laughter. I can understand that

Michele

I do the minimum and there are people who are very good at it and make money doing it. But I don't find it interesting. I'd much rather work with people on a social or emotional or psychological basis. And I'd rather give people hugs than or help them in other ways. Computers and information aren't my forte. Really. I mean, I think I know the things. I'm better at

Ani

As we finish up Is there anything you thought about saying or sharing today that you'd like to finish up with?

Michele

I think that the most important thing about aging that I've learned is that there's certain things we have to have.

We have to have hope.

And that is that life is going to be better or good.

We have to have purpose in our lives. And, and it can be it can look like anything and we have to be mentally active.

So our brains have to be mentally active.

Ani

Thank you very much. It's wonderful to have you here today. And we look forward to putting your words and ideas on our podcast Growing Old(er).

Preston

You know, I see an opportunity for Michele to come back because we haven't finished the conversation. And I think if we could look down the road, month, two months or so, to sit down again, and have some more of this conversation, I think would be very useful and very, I would love talking with you.

Michele

Okay, because I haven't talked to you. Yeah, Ty, and there's probably more I have a big mouth, you know,

Preston

Hey.

So yeah, there's lots of other things we can talk about, but we try to wrap it up at about this length. And so thank you so much, Michele for agreeing to do this. And to sitting in, you know, laying it all out and talking about it.

Michele

Thank you.

My pleasure. Really.

Ani

Thank you.

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