

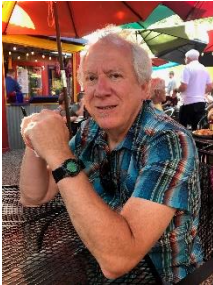


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*50+ Living our best lives now and in the future!*

**Destined**

A retired English teacher, a percussionist in two rock bands, and a hardy adventurer, Mark Rochester’s interests began emerging when he was a boy. “Sometimes I think I haven’t really changed that much since I was in fifth grade. I rode my bike everywhere and enjoyed the freedom. I started playing drums in the school band and began playing in a very limited rock group by the next year. I already had a penchant for travel and enjoyed taking family trips. My subject strengths in school were reading, writing, and social sciences. Is that how I ended up here today?”



**Early Exposure**

Growing up, Rochester was exposed to a wide range of music—everything from “big band crooners to country, and I carried my red Montgomery Ward transistor radio with me. I was aware of Elvis early on (thanks to cousins), but the British invasion captured my interest in popular music—the Beatles, Stones, et al.”

He also followed Bruce Springsteen and has “always been big on Dylan” and other artists.

“My folks used to read to us when we were kids. That’s where I first met Mark Twain through Tom Sawyer. The humor certainly provided an initial draw, but there’s much more. Which are my favorites? That’s like asking, ‘Who is your favorite child?’”

**The Family Business**

“On the one hand, education was the family business, so I was exposed early on. But to a certain extent, I initially avoided it early on. I took a circuitous route to complete my degree, dropping in and out for work, travel, and other adventures—basically the ten-year plan.”

Rochester eventually became a high school English teacher. He taught for over 32 years. Because he had a social sciences certification, he taught some classes in that area. However, “the bulk of my load was upper level required English classes.” In addition, he taught a journalism class and worked with the school newspaper. Over the years, Rochester also developed some new elective

courses; Rock Music and Popular Culture was one of the last he developed and taught.

“It was a great feeling walking into a class when you had a lesson you knew would kill. Now I get great satisfaction running into former students or hearing from them and seeing what great adults they’ve become—and often, the ones you were most worried about pull off the ‘adult thing’ better than you imagine.”

### **His Younger Self Would Be Proud**

At present, Rochester is part of two rock bands. Along with his brother, the first band is one he has played in since he was a teenager. “A third member, ‘the kid,’ joined the band about 40 years ago. I suppose we’re more of a traditional bar band and sometimes a little bluesier than my other endeavor.”



The second band is “the one that’s hustling right now” and “has been together for almost three years. I’m the old guy. We’re on CD and all the major streaming services, and we’ve even sold a few. We’ve been played on regular rotation on the local community radio station. My fifteen-year-old self would be proud. (Actually, my fifteen-year-old self wouldn’t have known what a CD or streaming service is...) Our gigs include the usual suspects—breweries, festivals, private parties, and bars.”

### **Still Biking**

“For quite a few years now, I’ve been bicycle-touring with some combo of four friends. We tend to do ‘credit card touring,’ meaning we ride touring bikes with panniers (track-mounted bags) that haul our clothes and gear, but we stay in motels and eat in restaurants rather



than camping. Usually, we go for a week or two.” Some of his memorable trips have included biking from Southern Oregon to San Francisco and Lake Tahoe and riding from Idaho to B.C. “One of my favorites was a hut-to-hut mountain bike ride from Durango, Colorado, to Moab, Utah.”

“There’s a cardio benefit from riding, which tends to be joint-friendly. Cycling works the big muscles, and mountain biking is even more of a full-body workout. It helps keep your balance on track.”

### **Backpacking Adventures**

“I have a group I backpack with every year. We’ve gone everywhere from British Columbia to the Wind River range in Wyoming, to the Rockies in Colorado, to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and all over Oregon. I also spend a weekend or two each winter with friends as part of the Volunteer in the Parks program at Crater Lake National Park.” When Rochester and his wife, Susan, travel, they “tend to hike or walk extensively.” They also live near a paved pedestrian/bike path “that’s good for up to a four-mile walk.”



### **For Relaxation**

“Reading is big on my list, and occasionally staring into space. I try to complete a crossword puzzle a day. I still attend concerts and music events, which I enjoy immensely. Also, as the high school kids say, ‘hanging out with friends.’ As an alum of the University of Oregon, Rochester is a Duck fan and enjoys attending athletic and cultural events at U of O. “Go Ducks.”

### **Advice for Others**

“For me, having upcoming events on the calendar is always a motivator—whether to prepare for an upcoming bike tour, a backpacking trip or practice an instrument.”

## Biking and the Environment

From a [UCLA Blog](#), “By not using any gas, bikes don’t release harmful emissions that pollute the atmosphere” and do not contribute to climate change. Further, fewer cars and more bikes on the road can reduce noise pollution.

## Bicycling Health Benefits and Safety Issues

Often, older adults enjoy numerous [benefits](#) because of bicycling. It is a low-impact form of exercise that may aid in weight loss. Biking can be good for our hearts, and it may help with memory retention because it can help oxygenate our brains, and it could also be “a healthy exercise for those recovering from a stroke or heart attack.” Of course, checking with your healthcare provider before starting any new exercise program is always a good idea.

### Safety

A 2015 AARP Livable Communities [report](#) states, “In the Netherlands, 25 percent of all trips taken by people 75 and older are on a bicycle compared to less than half of one percent for Americans over 65. Indeed, Dutch people aged 55-plus bicycle at the same rate as the whole population.”

Many older Americans feel unsafe traveling alongside automobiles or using “conventional bike lanes (with a stripe painted on the street).” However, [protected bike lanes](#) provide greater safety and encourage broader participation. Like other countries, some areas in the United States are now developing protected bike lanes to promote greater participation in such a healthy, environmentally friendly activity.

### Bicycle Choices for Balance Issues

In addition to discovering safe places to ride,

choosing the right bicycle for the greatest safety is also important. For example, those with [balance problems may want to consider](#) a three-wheel bike (an adult trike), an electric trike, a fat tire electric bike, or a recumbent bike. Recumbent bikes “are designed to be comfortable, with a larger seat and back support; many have pulse sensors on the handlebars, allowing you to track your heart rate. The seat is closer to the ground, which may be easier for some older adults to get on” the bike.



## Veteran Advocating for Older Adults

Featured in the [November 2019 Boomer Best U Newsletter](#), U.S. Navy Veteran James Hill has



acquired a lot of knowledge and experience related to aging issues. Has been a field examiner with Veteran Affairs since graduating in 2014 with a master’s degree in

Gerontology. In the spring of 2023, Hill received a second master’s degree from the University of Southern California in Aging Management Services. He has used his knowledge of aging issues “to provide services and advocate for older adults and fellow veterans’ families.” As a field examiner, he appoints fiduciaries to manage the funds of beneficiaries who cannot manage their finances. He is also fighting to address financial abuses and neglect that occurred during COVID.

Hill’s recent graduate work gave him additional insights “into the services that can be provided to make up for the shortfalls due to the lack of workers” in the field of aging. “With many innovative technologies geared toward older adults and those who work in the industry, I was exposed



to the use of robots, wearables, and fall detection devices to provide the non-human workers in facilities but also allow older adults to age in place and stay in their communities.”

Hill was also exposed to European community models for older adults that Americans are starting to adopt. These models rely on neighbors caring for neighbors. With a significant focus on aging in place, he walked through his community and completed a “walk audit,” noting things like “sidewalks, bus services, crosswalks, and the amount of traffic on the road”—many of “the things that make it safe to live in a community, especially when older adults start to age with no family around.” If you want to do a walk audit in your neighborhood, Hill suggests you check out AARP’s [Walk Audit Tool Kit](#).



## Remembering Health Heart Essentials

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. [Memorial Hermann Medical](#) reports that the “average age for a heart attack is 64.5 for men and 70.3 for women, but nearly 20% of those who die of heart disease are under 65.”



The [American Heart Association](#) recommends eight essential practices to help support your heart health:

1. Developing healthy eating habits is essential. Aim for “whole foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, lean protein (such as fish, seafood, and skinless poultry), nuts, seeds, and non-tropical oils such as olive or canola.”
2. Regular exercise is vital for our well-being and a healthy heart. “Adults should get 2 ½ hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week.”

3. Avoid inhaling nicotine products.
4. Get enough sleep. “Most adults need 7-9 hours per night.”
5. Working with your healthcare provider, maintain a healthy weight.
6. “High levels of non-HDL, or “bad,” cholesterol can lead to heart disease.” Check with your healthcare professional.
7. Monitoring and managing blood pressure and (8) blood glucose levels are critical for a heart-healthy life.

## A Widowhood Journey

When I remarried 25 years ago, I never thought about the phrase, “Till death do us part.” Yet, if any couple stays together long enough, it is almost inevitable that one will pass before the other.

I lost my late husband to a heart attack in May 2022. Since then, I have learned a few things that have helped me transition into widowhood and a new phase in my life. If you have recently become widowed or know of someone who is now navigating this new territory, I’ve written a couple of articles for *Next Avenue* that might help. My most recent article is “[9 Empowering Activities I Embraced During the First Year of Widowhood](#).”

If you are one who now belongs to “the club no one wants to join,” please know you are not alone.

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