

Marin discussion groups help older adults navigate life's 'third act' – Marin Independent Journal

mij marinij.com/2026/02/16/marin-group-helps-older-adults-navigate-lifes-third-act

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February 16, 2026



When I retired, I didn't know who I was. I'd had a varied professional career. I was in corporate banking for 20 years, where I enjoyed learning the nuances of finance, especially the international aspects, as well as being able to support my family. I then got to be a full-time mom for about 10 years as my husband and I were able to switch support roles. After that, I managed volunteer programs for two different educational nonprofits. In both volunteer programs, we placed retired adults as tutors in Marin classrooms. This role was rewarding because it allowed me to bring forward my business skills while supporting the development of educational potential — something I'm passionate about — as well as the personal growth of both the students and volunteers. A great deal of my identity came from my work as a banker, mom and volunteer program manager.

The death of my father and a few other life events caused me to begin thinking about my next chapter and how I want this period of my life to unfold. My husband was already retired and provided a good role model on how to "do it right." I observed that his first few months were spent

“at sea,” figuring out what to do next. The challenge was how to establish a balance between too much and too little structure, a balance that’s different for everyone. I also noticed that retirement freed him to try new things and pursue more activities he was curious about without having to consider the economic impact on us. However, even with this role model close by, I also experienced feeling disoriented and wondering “Who am I?” as I retired.

What was — and is — important to me? I want to continue to grow personally, add value in my community, make meaningful connections with others and have the freedom to do the things that bring me joy and fun. Some activities I’ve pursued are volunteering as an AARP Tax-Aide, engaging with AAUW Marin’s Tech Trek program, hiking regularly with friends and joining AgeSong Marin.

Two of my volunteer tutors had participated in AgeSong Marin, a discussion group for people ages 65 and older who reflect on how they want to live their “third act” and share how it’s unfolding for them. Joining AgeSong Marin allowed me to incorporate aspects of my professional career that I valued, such as learning, self-growth, having meaningful relationships, doing things I find of value and feeling competent. Since joining, I’ve discovered I have things in common with people sometimes 20 or more years older than me as well as my own age. I share insights, stories and deep connections with people I would not have otherwise met. It’s safe to discuss subjects that are taboo in other circles, such as the realities of getting older and even death. We also laugh a lot and celebrate and support each other. I appreciate the wisdom and breadth of life experiences and family backgrounds that everyone in my group brings to the discussion.

Individuals come to AgeSong Marin for different reasons. Often prospective members say they want to make new friends, and, in the process, they find this becomes more than a superficial conversation. Instead, it’s a nourishing and supportive weekly experience. AgeSong Marin groups typically meet for 90 minutes once a week over an eight-week period. If you would like more information, visit AgeSongMarin.org or call 415-234-5040.

Judy Kramer is a retired professional who lives in San Rafael. IJ readers are invited to share their stories of love, dating, parenting, marriage, friendship and other experiences for our How It Is column, which runs Tuesdays in the Lifestyles section. All stories must not have been published in part or in its entirety previously. Send your stories of no more than 600 words to lifestyles@marinij.com. Please write How It Is in the subject line. The IJ reserves the right to edit them for publication. Please include your full name, address and a daytime phone number.