

# Free Preview

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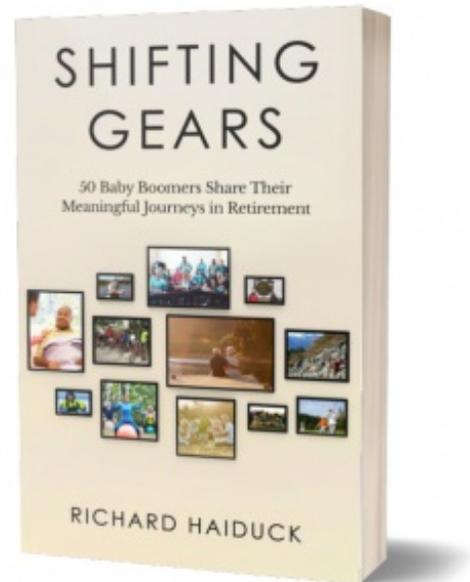
## **An extract from the prologue of *Shifting Gears***

Winding up from the picturesque village of Conques in the south of France is the Le Puy route of the iconic Camino de Santiago pilgrim trail. The Peregrinos (pilgrims) who have chosen this part of the route face one of the steepest climbs on the five-hundred mile trail. The trail at this point is a narrow gully surrounded by forest, and it winds upward through a series of switchbacks. The peak can't be seen, so it creates uncertainty about whether you have enough reserves to make it to the top.

There are loose rocks underfoot; it's easy to misstep, especially after fatigue has set in. It's only natural to lower your head and watch your step to avoid a fall. Rounding one of the switchbacks, you emerge from the dense tree coverage and suddenly realize you have made it. You've arrived at the peak.

There, in the clearing, you see a surprising object; an oval-shaped wooden outhouse. Scrawled across the door by a grateful Peregrino are words you will remember for the rest of your life; "Lift up your head, the hard part is over." You have arrived at the peak and have earned the right to lift your head and enjoy what you have accomplished.

Many of the stories in this book are about people who can lift up their head. They have completed a lot in their life; a big part of their climb has been accomplished. They have earned the right to lift up their head for this next stage of their life. They are deciding what is important to them and making choices. Some of those choices are challenging and aggressive, but they are being done as a matter of choice. The retirees have earned the freedom to make choices about what they really want to do next. They tell us their stories in *Shifting Gears; 50 Baby Boomers Share Their Meaningful Journeys in Retirement*.



*Shifting Gears* tells about the individual shifts made by the retirees as they transitioned into this stage of their life. The book is focused on retirees who share stories about their meaningful journeys in retirement. The stories are a sampling of the broader shift of a whole generation that is reshaping retirement. The boomer generation is taking different approaches to their retirement years. They have more time, more money and more freedom to do things that the previous generation could not even consider. Baby boomers grew up in remarkably different times and those cultural differences have led to a refreshed attitude towards how to spend the rest of their lives.

It's not surprising that retirement is being reinvented by the boomers. Boomers are used to being activists and pushing their limits. They want more—more activity, more passion, more experimentation. No longer is retirement simply ceasing work and adding a leisure activity or two. It's so much more. Giving voice to these changes by sharing the personal stories of this new generation of retirees shows just how far they have come. They are having an impact on those around them. Examples show that the stakes are higher. Many of the people interviewed for this book have called retirement the best time of their life.

There is a generational culture that can't be ignored and the examples have not yet been fully articulated. Embracing a whole new lifestyle by taking on a vibrant range of active, challenging, fun, meaningful and socially engaged activities in their "golden years" isn't the retirement experience of a select few, but a driving force for this generation. I became determined to share their stories and awaken us all to the shift toward a more expansive way of retiring that is happening right now.

I began each interview with the open-ended question, "How would you describe this stage of your life?" and that got us off to a good start. I was surprised, and pleased, at how open and trusting the interviewees were. I was appreciative of their willingness to share not only their experiences, but their most intimate fears, motivations, and hopes.

One of my early interviews was with Donna. She had undergone four leg surgeries and was on a cane for three years. Once healed, she decided to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa. She tested her limits in an unforgettable and inspiring way.

Maurice is a four-time Emmy award winning documentarian, who has always worked for someone else. Now he has decided to step out from an employer's shadow and shoot a documentary with his own creative control. This time he's doing a project the way he wants to do it. And he'll do it in Gaza.

Michael had to deal with breaking up with his partner of twenty-four years, while simultaneously losing his vision.

Jane and her girlfriends decided that their seventies were the right time to learn to play

ukulele and share the joy of a new hobby together.

Bruce and Jill have always had a passion for helping people in tough circumstances. Now they both volunteer in a maximum security prison, teaching anger management to prisoners using Buddhist meditation principles.

The book is a collection of oral histories, using the words of the interviewee describing how they are shifting gears as they move forward in their meaningful retirement journey. Some are shifting smoothly, some grind the gears a bit, and some are still learning to shift. Their stories are a slice of their reality at the moment. Open questions remain in several stories. The reader will get a short but vivid portrait of each person and what they have done, but also a glimpse of the motivations and emotions that have accompanied their activities.

You can take comfort in knowing that you are not alone in seeking to tailor your life into what you want for these later years. There is a large community of your fellow explorers, several appearing in the following pages.

*Please feel free to pass this message along to fellow retirees who you think would be interested in storytelling about meaningful journeys in retirement.*

*If you would like to pre-order the book, please go to [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and search for Shifting Gears book*