

Turning Retirement on Its Head

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Inspirational stories of people who started businesses they love after their first careers ended.

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Some kids know early on what they want to do when they grow up. For David Hull of Atlanta, Georgia, broadcasting seemed to always be part of his life. "I started listening to the radio at an early age," he says. "When other kids were playing football or cowboys and Indians, I was in my room spinning records and pretending to be a disc jockey."

After spending almost 25 years as a radio news anchor, in 2008 he found himself without a job as his company laid off thousands of employees nationwide. "I've always enjoyed cooking and discovered that it was more effective than [walking my dog](https://www.nextavenue.org/how-to-walk-your-dog-sans-injury/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/how-to-walk-your-dog-sans-injury/>) in the park for attracting dates," he relates. "But I never envisioned doing it professionally."

That changed when he started interviewing local restaurant owners for a weekend radio show he hosted. It was so enjoyable that he decided to go to culinary school and become a chef himself. He prepares meals at clients' homes or other venues.

Passion for a Second Career

"Since starting [Hullskitchen](https://hullskitchen.net/) (<https://hullskitchen.net/>), I've spent 15 years cooking in beautiful homes, meeting cool people and never regretting my decision to change

course," says Hull.

The classic notion of what retirement looks like is being turned on its head as older adults are deciding to return to the workplace at an unprecedented rate. A [recent report](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11324230) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11324230>) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics states that 38.4% of American workers are aged 55 and older. Men over 70 who are still working now number more than 3 million.

Reasons for this "unretirement" (<https://www.nextavenue.org/tired-of-retirement-try-unretiring/>) trend vary from financial needs to a desire for personal fulfillment. While many people return to their previous field as employees or consultants, others, like Hull, decide to turn a passion or side hustle into a business.

Reviving a Childhood Hobby

Enjoyable pastimes from earlier in life often get pushed aside by job and family commitments. Having the opportunity to revive a favorite interest in retirement and create a passion-driven second career can be particularly gratifying.

Dr. Fred Ballet of Manhattan recalls, "I have many fond memories from my teenage years working in the darkroom with my dad in the days of film photography." The rigors of attending medical school, then establishing a successful practice as a hand surgeon, put any thoughts of photography on the shelf for years.

As retirement approached, Ballet decided to renew his passion and studied digital imagery at the [Tilt Institute for the Contemporary Image](https://tiltinstitute.org/) (<https://tiltinstitute.org/>) in Philadelphia. At the encouragement of his instructors, friends and family, he started displaying his work publicly and is now represented by six galleries in the New York/New Jersey area. A personal dream is



scheduled to come true on March 18, when Ballet's first solo show begins at [Pleiades Gallery](https://www.pleiadesgallery.com/) (https://www.pleiadesgallery.com/), one of the oldest galleries in New York City. It will run through April 11.

Reflecting on his shift from surgery to fine art photography, Ballet says, "Every life event has an ending and new beginning. How these transitions are handled is what defines the individual. Dedication to all endeavors has always been my driving force."

From Architect to Chocolatier

David Upchurch spent time in France as a student and fell in love with the fine pastries and chocolate he discovered there. He became an architect in San Francisco but, like millions of other Americans, lost his livelihood in the 2008 economic downturn.

Unable to find employment in his chosen profession, he decided to enroll in pastry classes at the City College of San Francisco, which led to an internship at San Francisco Baking Institute. He was then able to hone his chocolate-making skills with a five-year stint working under renowned chocolatier Michael Recchiuti before striking out on his own in 2018.

"I've been following my passion ever since, even though I'm continuing to learn about how to actually run a business," says Upchurch. To keep overhead low, he produces his confections in a commercial kitchen shared with other chefs and sets up booths at local markets rather than maintaining a traditional brick-and-mortar retail space.

"I'm blessed to be able to do what I love," says Upchurch. "It brings me such joy that through my [small business](https://www.duchocolatier.com/) (https://www.duchocolatier.com/) I am able to create experiences with chocolate for my loyal customers that are delicious, enlightening and soulful as well."

Discovering a True Calling

Sue Williams spent over 20 years as business manager for a multi-campus residential primary school in Victoria, Australia, overseeing a staff of 80 and a \$7 million budget. "I loved the responsibility," she says, "but the repetitive nature of the work eventually led me to seek a

more fulfilling path."

She realized her true calling was in holistic health and wellness. While maintaining her full-time job, she delved into neuro-linguistic programming and completed programs in clinical hypnotherapy and quantum counseling.

"Now, at nearly 70 years old," says Williams, "I've transitioned to a deeply fulfilling second career as a clinical hypnotherapist, mindset coach and holistic wellness consultant. My practice supports equestrians, athletes and professionals in achieving peak performance."

She adds, "I've been able to redefine success by doing work that truly aligns with my passions and purpose. I hope my story offers inspiration to others who are considering their own next chapter."

Mother-Daughter Collaboration

After more than 30 years in academia as a professor of accounting, Kim Watty of Melbourne, Australia, knew she wanted something different for the last phase of her working life. A conversation with her daughter, Prue, laid the foundation for an unexpected new direction.

"In discussing my situation, we realized how women have numerous transition stages in their lives — career, empty nester, retirement, widowed," says Watty. "So many need help navigating both their retirement and what happens afterward."

Using the tools and techniques of the [Designing Your Life](https://designingyour.life/) (https://designingyour.life/) program developed at Stanford University, the mother-daughter duo have co-founded [The Main Act](https://www.themainact.com.au/) (https://www.themainact.com.au/), a platform to help women craft the next chapter in their lives, whether it is a career pivot or an entirely different way of living.

"Embracing this entirely new venture at age 66 has provided so many lessons about reinvention, purpose and intergenerational collaboration," says Watty. "Prue and I are having so much fun learning from and with each other."

Getting the Band Back Together

Tim McNamara of Lake View, New York, has retired twice. Shortly after exiting a career in human resources in 2017, a friend asked if he had ever considered being a Federal Labor Mediator.

"It was a job I had always desired," says McNamara. "One thing led to the next, and just eight months after 'retiring' I was hired by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service."

Retiring again five years later, McNamara's life took an unexpected turn when a longtime friend asked him to audition as a guitarist for his [band](https://www.nextavenue.org/reigniting-memories-of-my-band-days/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/reigniting-memories-of-my-band-days/>). Playing guitar had been a passion since he was 9 years old, so even though he hadn't performed in public since he and his friend were in a band together in the '70s, he decided to give it a shot.

The audition was successful, and they're still going strong. "I always joked with my wife that someday I would get the [band](https://www.facebook.com/groups/764461015057128/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalink=1155383489298210) (https://www.facebook.com/groups/764461015057128/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalink=1155383489298210) back together," McNamara relates. "Doing this after a 45-year hiatus has been a godsend and just what I needed after my second retirement."

The Common Denominator

Unretirement is quickly morphing from a novel, never-before-possible curiosity to an extraordinary opportunity to exit our lives with a bang instead of a whimper.

The stories we've shared run the gamut of unlikely encore careers. From revived childhood interests to totally new, unexplored paths. Necessity for generating income to just plain fun.

The commonality they all share is *passion*. And, interestingly, being of service to others.

Is there something you've always wanted to do? Or have you discovered an exciting new interest? By all means, listen to that inner voice, ignore your fears and, as Nike has encouraged for years, "Just do it!"