

The People Who Make Ashland Special

"Going for It with Abandon" with Colleen Pyke of Jefferson Public Radio

By Jordan Pease - Feb. 2021 Issue of **Locals Guide Magazine**- Ashland, Oregon



Colleen Pyke's friendly and charismatic voice is known to many thousands of Rogue Valley residents, emanating from radios tuned to **Jefferson Public Radio** over the last decade or more. She's a 30-year broadcasting professional, starting while attending SOU in the '80s. She graduated with a Communications Degree in 1985, and worked as a television reporter for KDRV in Medford. Then she returned to her love of public radio and JPR a few years later.

She currently works at JPR part-time now, after spending 13 years hosting several programs including **Open Air** and **The Healing Arts**. She's also a licensed realtor with **Gateway Real Estate** in Ashland. Colleen loves traveling internationally, including Europe and Nepal, and she's eager to travel more soon. Greece, Italy, and Ireland are on her bucket list. She's a dedicated pet lover, an avid baker and cook, and Godmother to several lucky children.

You've lived here a long time, Colleen- What attracted you here, and is there a particular day that stands out and why? "I've been here 42 years now. The first thing that stood out moving here from Portland was certainly there's no traffic. And the skies are blue. The clouds actually separate and you get blue sky with white fluffy clouds. But in terms of what stands out, just like everybody else probably; 9/11. The shock for the whole country.

It used to be that the **Ashland Food Co-op** was this little hippie place, and now it's major commerce. There's a line around the building at Christmas time. People want the kinds of things that Ashland has to offer. I would say it's a type of consciousness here. You know, people caring about the environment, caring about what they put in their bodies, rather than just slamming-down a fast-food item for example. I love that Ashland is that way."

Of all the radio interviews you've done, is there a particularly memorable one? "I started doing radio interviews because my father had terminal cancer from working with asbestos in the 40s. He came from Tucson to live with me and my husband, and I

took him from doctor to doctor and nobody wanted to address the real issue, which was that he was already very far gone.

So then I thought, I want to do an interview show. It was originally called **The Healing Arts** and we could talk about 'alternative' things, so that maybe general people could hear something that might help them. An example could be a woman is battered and feels powerless. And I do an interview with say, a Jackson County battered women's group. Then maybe somebody just hears a few things, and it gives them an insight and the strength to change their life?

So rather than one particular interview, it was the whole concept of getting out really alternative information, whether it's natural healing, psychological healing, or other things like that that are available. [Early on,] I interviewed a fellow about quantum physics which got a big, positive reaction. So I really love just the general idea of being able to talk to people like that and getting inspiring information out."

What's a thing people would never guess about you? "Hmmm, I just don't know! What would they never guess? Well, one of the things I have going on is I am an introverted extrovert. I've had people say, "oh wow, you're so fun!" But what they don't realize is when I go home, I go silent. Because I need that rejuvenation time? So maybe they'd not guess that I'm an introvert in an extroverted way."

What's your best talent? "I would say it's doing voice work. Whether it's interviewing people, or voicing a commercial, or voicing for the JPR. People have commented to me, 'how can you pronounce those words?' Like big medical words or something. I'd say that's my best talent, and that I can put people at ease usually."

Please tell a story about a life-changing incident, or can you recall a life-changing epiphany? "A life-changing event was going on a trek in Nepal right after 9/11. So 9/11 had just happened, then I got on an airplane with a friend, and joined a Sherpa group. We did this 150-mile trek from outside of Kathmandu to the border of Tibet. You get yourself out there a few days, with no roads. And you suddenly realize how vulnerable you are.

Just seeing the simple life that these people would live. I got to talk to one woman in a small village. I had just wanted to go off and hike up 'over there' by myself. And of course the Sherpa guys wouldn't let me because I was female. I think I was 49 at the

time, and the woman was just stunned that I could be just going off somewhere by myself like that.

But the breathtaking views of the Himalayas. And the clear, clear crisp air, and with the absolute Third World conditions everywhere, no infrastructure. Just all of that came crashing into my brain, and I think I grew as a result."

Alright, ready for a speed round now? Please answer these ones quickly; iPhone or Android? "Android." **Mac or PC?** "PC." **Chardonnay or merlot?** "Merlot." **Winter or spring?** "Spring." **Dogs or Cats?** "Well, I've got both, but let's go with dogs. Because they're so loyal!" **Mexican or Chinese?** "Chinese. Thai actually." **New York or Paris?** "Paris. Paris of course, ha-ha!" **Highway 99 or I-5?** "Ninety-nine." **Laurel or Yanny?** "Laurel." [For readers not familiar with this question from 2018; Google that phrase to learn about a fascinating auditory perception phenomenon.]

Okay, now for the 'banished to a desert island' question; what would you bring? Quick answers on these ones too please. What's your favorite food, book, music, and movie. Ready? Food? "Popcorn." **Book?** "Encyclopedia." **Oooo, very interesting answer, Colleen. Music?** "Enya." **Any Particular Enya album?** I don't know, they all sound the same! **Movie?** "Sleepless in Seattle."

Love it! Let's do a few more, okay? These ones I borrowed from Stephen Colbert: Most dangerous animal? "I would say a hungry cougar." **Ha! As opposed to a well-fed one? Mine would be rattlesnake I think. Next; still or sparkling?** "Um, sparkling." **Hum. Always still for me, I seem to be in the minority. Here's the last one now; five words to describe the rest of your life?** "Going for it with abandon!" **Oh, how perfect, Colleen! Wow, that might become the title of this interview!**

What's a stand-out experience for you with Almeda Fire? "I was in downtown Ashland that day, and couldn't get home. I live in Phoenix now. I grabbed a friend at my office and we tried to drive out of town, but only got as far as about Hersey street. We had to go back because the people coming the other direction were like waving their arms; "go back, go back!" So a stand out experience was finding out that my neighbor had gone to my house and got my dog [Roxy.] She's getting older and they just basically rescued her because she couldn't have handled that. And then two days later 'sneaking in' because my neighbors told me how, I told the sheriff after I came in, but sneaking in and getting my passport and my cats.



So yeah, it was just terrifying, and I'm so grateful that my house was saved and my pets are ok. Just so grateful. It's just a fluke that my side of Colver Road was spared. I think they were trying to keep it away from **Norton Lumber** and some big oil tanks that are near the railroad tracks there."

Do you have a favorite dog-walking area? "Well, for dog walking, it would be the top of **Lithia Park**, where dogs can go. That would be up past the water tank and the fairy ponds. But don't tell anybody! And then for just a person walking in the park, I love walking through from the lower duck pond on up to the upper duck pond, and then whenever it is in May or something, seeing the rhododendrons and just hanging out. It's just beautiful there."

What's your favorite clothing store in Ashland? "This is one of the unfortunate results of Covid and the Alameda Fire because **Earthly Goods** is gone now, and they had gorgeous clothes. Although they were probably planning on being gone prior to Covid, but we've lost so many great places. I love **Paddington Station** you know, and I also frequent **Déjà Vu**."

What advice do you have for the young people in our community? "It's important for young people to read and stay informed. To not just go with one genre of news, but to really inform themselves as best they can on topics because these young people coming in, they are our future. I know everybody says that at graduation ceremonies, but right now where there's so much mistrust and divisiveness, it's so important. I should preface that though since I've talked to a couple friends that obviously are not keeping up with even the simple structures of democracy. They don't seem to know what the Constitution even IS! So, I would say my advice to them is to keep educated and informed."

Jordan Pease is a 19-year resident of Ashland and Founder/Director of **Rogue Valley Metaphysical Library and Media Exchange**. www.RVML.org