

Locals Spotlight: **Joyce Epstein**

Open Eyes, Open Ears, and Open Mind

By **Jordan Pease**. Photos by **Graham Lewis**.

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Joyce Epstein has been a very active contributor to the Ashland community for the last 33 years, which is roughly only the median age of most of us Ashlanders. When you're just a few years shy of your 100th birthday, you've accumulated more life experience than the rest of us youngsters, and Joyce has a lot to share. After I asked this wise elder of our community permission to reveal her actual age and birthday here, I was curious to look up her astrological profile. According to the Western, astrological Zodiac, *Sagittarians* like Joyce, born **December 4, 1927**, are known for being *assertive, restless and open*. I asked Joyce if those traits rang true for her.

"I sure love my community, I am so honored you invited me for this interview Jordan, thank you. Assertive, restless and open does ring true, except the one thing that is special for me has to do with travel. I'm always traveling in my mind, and that has been something. I never used to read the astrology charts or anything like that, but when I did come across that information about Sagittarians, I really glommed onto that because I felt that was something I've been doing all my life. Restless, yes, like wanderlust in *my mind*. I don't have to actually go and do it, but in my mind I'm always, always traveling. Always exploring."

Please tell your "how I got to Ashland" story. "I had friends who had moved from **Los Angeles** to Ashland. Close friends, and also my son's close friends from **Berkeley, CA** had moved here, and I came to visit in 1986. I actually moved here in 1988, and I was just taken from the very first day when they dropped me off in town. I walked a few blocks by myself, and people smiled! And looked me in the face, in the eye. And being from **New York** and **Los Angeles**, you don't dare look people in the eye! Even in your car, you don't glance at the vehicle next to you. So, I went back to LA and told all my children yes, I'm moving to Ashland. Who knew? I wasn't planning on making a change, but this community, it appealed to me in a very special way, and I had to go back and tell my children. And they didn't believe me until they saw the moving truck outside my house!"

You have been involved with nearly all the major organizations in Ashland over the years I think? "When I first got here, I immediately got involved. I was very excited about having the University here and the **Schneider Art Museum**. That was before **Science Works** got started. I was interested in art always, and I'm interested in science too, but art has always been part of my life. At the Schneider, I had met **Florence Schneider** and her husband Bill (**William Schneider**.) Back then, I was so excited to such see a wonderful exhibit there. Then I met the Art Director **Greer Markle** and just felt immediately comfortable. He was both a mentor and inspiration. So, it was a comfort and also an excitement to find such a first-class institution! They gave me a tour and wanted me to volunteer. They were very persuasive!"



Please talk about some of the other places here you've been involved with? "After I moved here, I realized right at the start, in order to know a small town (I have only lived in big cities), the only way to try to come to an agreement that I can do it, that I can live here without all the hullabaloo and the fast traffic and all, is to volunteer! And I went to the **Chamber of Commerce**, in the same place it is now, and right away became their Tuesday volunteer there. And JPR, **Jefferson Public Radio**. I started volunteering there right away too. That's where I first got to know **Jeff Golden**, who was doing the Jefferson Exchange program, and I love **Geoff Riley, Colleen Pyke** and everybody there. I just learned that Geoffrey Riley grew up in **New York City** too, and he remembers the planetarium in **Central Park!**"

"And then OSF, **Oregon Shakespeare Festival**, and **Oregon Stage Works**, **Peter Alzado** and **Ruth Wire** there. It seemed so easy to be here in Ashland, and people were helpful, and I just knew that this was where I wanted to be! I left family and friends behind, and I've never regretted a moment! This has been my home. A wonderful home!"

And you're still involved with the Schneider after all these years? "Yes, and even now with Zoom, every Friday. **Scott Malbaurn** who is the Director, he is very innovative, with the support and enthusiasm of the **Oregon Center of the Arts** at SOU. He often collaborates with the **Ashland Independent Film Festival** and putting on imaginative

programs, some of which are online, and with exhibits from the **Schnitzer Museum** in **Eugene**. He's always had wonderful staff helping him. He's always had students involved and visiting artists, and that's part of the mission with the students there, helping them advance any goals they might have. Involving so many young people. It's just been a wonderful exploration."

"The thing about Ashland is that there's so much. There's art, and music, and nature, everything is all around us. In fact, I would go to the **Chamber Greeters** meetings where all of the businesses would meet to network, and to share about their businesses. There, I realized that I like to develop slogans. One I developed is '*Open your eyes wider and come to the Schneider*' and with **Chamber Music Concerts** I established; '*Open your ears, there's nothing to fear*' (or; '*it all becomes clear!*') My slogan for the **Chamber of Commerce** and the community now is '*Shop, Support, Sustain*'."

Have you had any paranormal experiences? "Not really, but a local friend of mine had a close friend - a very wise woman. I'm so often misplacing things. Like my phone, my car keys. And she would say, if you're missing something. Sit down. Breathe deeply. Close your eyes. And when you open them, what you're missing will be within five feet of where you're sitting. It's happened only once; it's never happened since that initial time. So, I wish I could just conjure up that inner feeling or that sensation that led me to it. I don't know if that's paranormal? I respect paranormal activity, I do. I'm an admirer of **Jean Houston**, a great admirer."

"I'm a faithful reader of nonfiction, I'm not a keen fiction person. I love to *watch* stories though, in any form, but I can't handle suspense. If a movie or theater review says 'suspenseful', I back away. If there is anxiety; I don't feel I need it. I have some self-protective devices that have developed apparently. Another thing about me, most of the time I see both sides of things. Sometimes it's a hinderance, but I recognize that in myself."

Please complete this sentence about yourself: "The thing I like best about people is [fill in the blank]" "The thing I like best about people is that I can get feedback on myself. Because most people are open and not closed. It's that they are *real*, they are not storybook characters."

Here are some *desert island* questions for you now, Joyce: Please pick your most favorite FOOD, BOOK, MUSIC, and MOVIE? Book is **The Collected Poems of e. e.**

Comings or James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, music is Yo-Yo Ma's "Round the World." For movie I'll pick **Citizen Kane**, and food of course is chocolate. **Chocolate ice cream** actually if it wasn't a desert island though, please!

What advice do you have for young people please, Joyce? "Listen and learn. Be open. Question. Always question. That's the biggest feeling, yeah. You know, I was thinking the other day, thinking about art. Yes, I am always thinking about art! Pictures come to my mind, always. There's a famous painting of a man coming down an imperfect staircase [Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase"]. For some reason, I was drawn to that. It was one of my first introductions to abstract art and abstract thinking. Things don't have to be 'together'. Apart, you can explode it, you can explore, you can do everything with it. So, [the advice is] *to not be afraid of thinking outside the box.*"

Alright, let's do a speed round now, okay? Please answer these next ones quickly; roses or daises? "Babies." **Ha, ha- Sorry Joyce, no; roses or DAISIES** "Ha, ha!! Roses!" (I'm glad you chose babies over roses though, Joyce!) **Avocadoes or Mangos?** "Golden Mangos." **Walnuts or coconuts?** "Walnuts." **Big dogs or little dogs?** "Big dogs, big dogs. I actually have a big grand-dog now, my son's dog, so my *great*-grand dog." **Facebook or twitter?** "Neither!" **Snow or Surf?** "Snow. I don't swim. I'm afraid of water!" **Hair up or hair down?** "Hair down." **San Francisco or New York?** "New York!" **Symphony or Opera?** "Oh, oh. I would say Opera. Only because it touches, it *reaches* into a deeper part of me."

Thank you so much for sharing all this, Joyce, and for all you've contributed to our community. One more question, please; five words to describe the rest of your life? "Connected, questioning, grateful, maintaining. Is that five? One more? Open. That was my advice to young people, but it applies to old people too!"

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