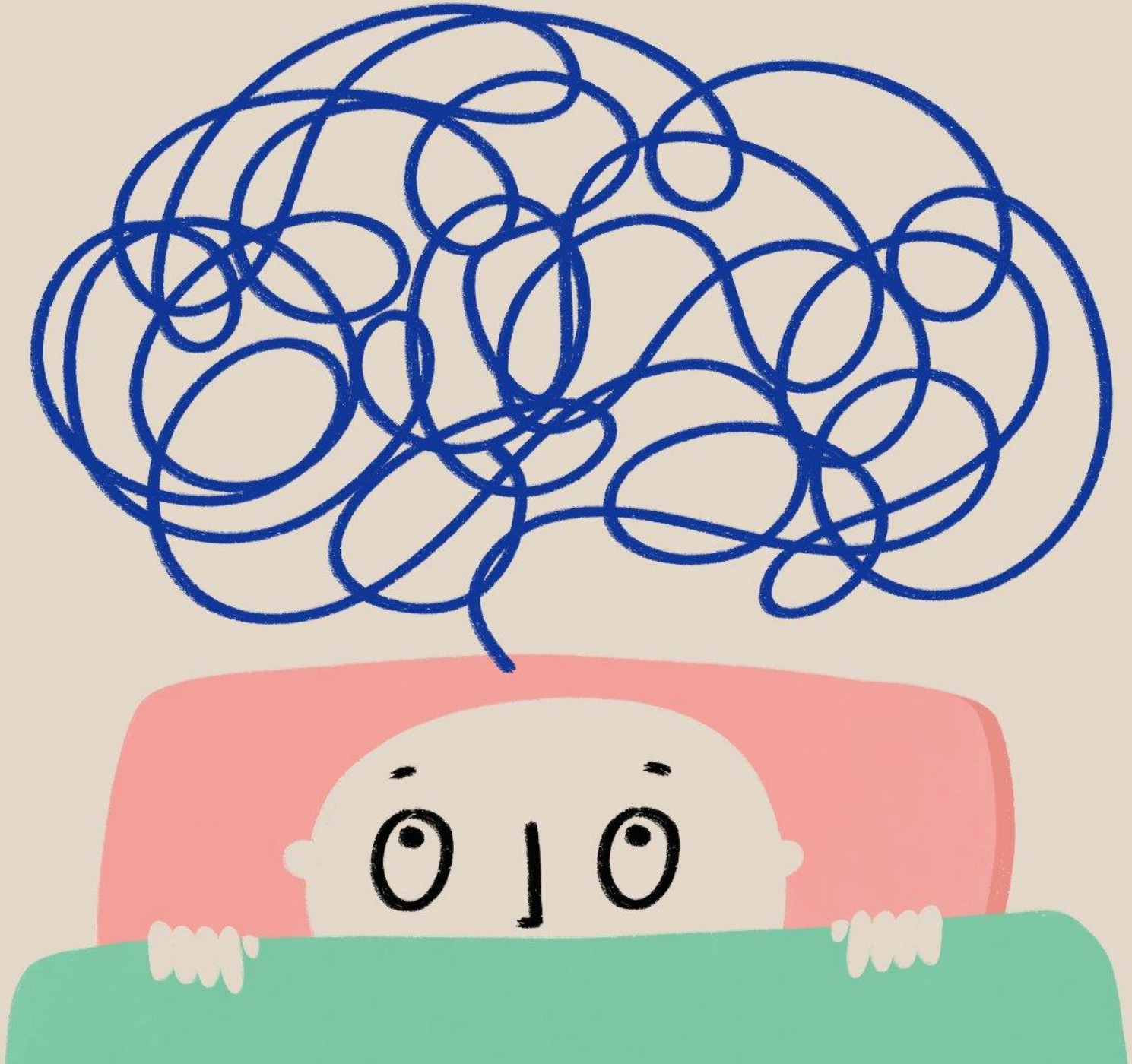
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No One Ever Asked

Kristin Kutac Ward



Maureen's Story.

I heard this story over 15 years ago and it really resonated with me - from David Smith at a Sales Culture Starter workshop at The Gatesworth.



The Road to Yes – Maureen's Story

9/15 **Husband died**

DISCOVERY & TRUST

6 touchpoints

1/24 Walk-In Tour

1/25 Call Out V2V

1/26 Handwritten note + pie

1/29 Return Tour

1/30 Call Out

1/31 Sent The 36-Hour Day

THE STALL

4 touchpoints

2/3 Call Out

2/7 Call Out

2/11 Call Out

2/12 Planning – We're Stuck

RE-ENGAGEMENT

4 touchpoints

2/17 Call In V2V

2/25 Planning session

2/26 Home Visit agreed

2/28 Pampering basket

THE DECISION

1 + the yes

3/2 Home Visit

3/5 Mom signs the deposit

Sales Notes

what the team wrote down

“No urgency.” Just started to look

“Suites too small.” Mom has a big house.

74 is very young, she's in good shape. “She still drives.”

“Depression probably due to grief and the daughter is panicking. We're being too pushy.”

Questions Raised in Planning

what the team asked each other

- Why did 74 year old “healthy” lady fall?
- Why is Jackie coming to visit assisted living if mom is healthy?
- Why did Bobbie come in from Chicago for so long?
- Why won't Jackie let us talk to mom?
- Doesn't make sense. What is really going on?

What was actually true.

- Dad had died September 15.
- Jackie discovers the extent of Mom's problems that Dad alluded to before his death – forgetfullness and some falls.
- Mom was angry with her daughters.
- A family grieving, telling no one.

The file said no urgency. The family was in the middle of the worst months of their lives. They were stressed and searching for the right solution and only one community asked.

Who really cares about mom... and what I'm going through

- Looking for acknowledgement that this is very difficult.
- Wants someone who respects Mom and doesn't talk down to her.
- Appreciates our attempts to follow up and someone willing to help.



The family never volunteered any of it.

- A promise made to a dying father
- Neighbors asking if anyone understood how serious her confusion was
- Daughters know this needs to happen although it is very difficult
- “I can't believe this is happening to me.”

Families do not volunteer their crisis.

Twelve selling hours and what they bought

4 face-to-face visits, including dinner with mom

5 voice-to-voice calls, including a brave voicemail *"Do you want us to keep calling?"*

3 creative follow-ups: flowers, a pie and a note, a copy of The 36-Hour Day, a pampering basket

1 home visit that changed everything: Motivational Interviewing with Mom, in Mom's own living room

She signed the deposit herself.

Because someone finally asked what was really going on and offered to help.

I thought I understood the emotional impact of asking good questions. And the importance of empathy.



Until I lived it.

My Year Long Story

September 2024 — October 2025

Two hurricanes. Seven moves. Four hospital stays.

JAN 2025

I start my own consulting business

Due diligence · positioning · sales and marketing assessments

WORK

Client engagements · travel · assessments

30+ in-person mystery shops · 10+ clients · 9 states

SEP '24 | OCT | NOV | DEC | JAN '25 | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP '25 | OCT

LIFE

Searching for assisted living for Mom — Austin

THE STORMS

9/26 Helene takes my house

10/9 Milton takes my sister's

10/24 Both families displaced

12/9 Bought a fixer-upper in NJ

THE DIAGNOSES

2/6 Dad: cancer Mom: dementia

2/27 Moved to NJ after 3 months on an air mattress in an AL community

3/10 Dad begins chemo

THE CAREGIVING

Mar–Apr Dad hospitalized, home health

4/26–5/9 Dad's stroke - hospice at their IL in FL

5/14–5/17 Mom hospitalized - TIA

THE LOSS & THE MOVE

7/4 Dad died

7/8–7/19 Mom hospitalized, then rehab

8/12 Moved Mom and her cat to TX – in with sister

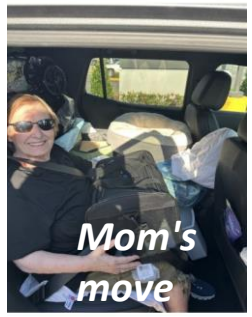
9/5 Mom moves to AL - Austin, TX

10/11 Dad's memorial service

10/31 I move back into my FL home







I have a business. A family. Thirty-seven hours a week of extra load is not a statistic. It is reality.

30+

communities assessed in person

March – July 2025

9 states

~20 operators

6 competencies scored 1–5

1 in 3

could not accommodate a walk-in visit

A walk-in is the highest-intent visit you will ever get.

1 story

Every shop needs a story.

I did not invent one. I used the one I was living. I had a mother with dementia, a father dying, traveling between NJ and FL caregiving and living and working.

Thirty communities were offered the same scenario

My ***stress*** was real.

My ***panic*** was real.

My ***story*** was real.

But no one ever asked.

Five fundamentals, not one community covered them.

0% asked about my mother's life story

0% used the prospect's name in the call

0% uncovered what she wanted or valued

0% identified who else was deciding

0% scheduled a specific next step

52%

The average mystery shop scored 15.7 out of 30 across six selling competencies scored 1-5.

Telephone & web shops across 9 states, ~14 operators. Teams open warmly — then collapse

Discovery is the weakest skill in the industry.



Maybe it was just me.
Just those thirty.

It wasn't.

Twenty years of the same findings

100,000+

mystery shops conducted by Primo Solutions over 20 years and the numbers have barely moved in the last 5 years.

98%

of salespeople talked more than 70% of the call.

60%

of sales counselors used the brochure as the close instead of a personal next step

45%

invited the shopper to visit within the first two minutes, before any discovery

35%

of shoppers had their questions go unanswered in the first call

Same pattern. Different scale.

THEIR 100,000+ SHOPS

90% questions were closed-ended

20% receptionists asked my name

38% ever invited the prospect to visit

15% of calls took 10+ attempts to reach a salesperson

MY 30 SHOPS

0% asked about my mother's life story

0% used the prospect's name

0% scheduled a specific next step

16 attempts and 7 voicemails (my worst shop)

Why does this matter NOW more than ever before??

Three Generations of Prospects

Who has been walking through your door, and who is walking through it now.

Silent Generation — shopped 1990s – 2000s

Boomers — shopped 2000s – 2010s

Gen X
shopping now

46–61 their age today

51 average age of the U.S. family caregiver

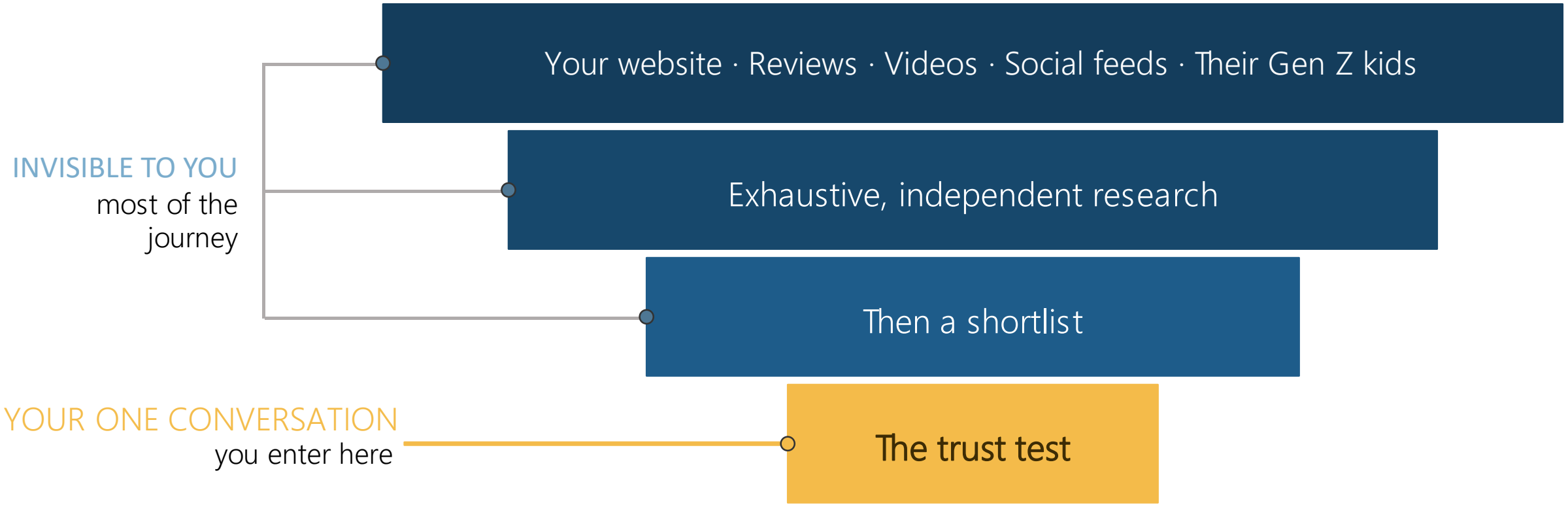
Why Gen X is so skeptical and demanding

None of it is personal. All of it was learned.

WHAT SHAPED THEM		HOW IT SHOWS UP ON YOUR CALL
Latchkey childhood. Home alone, sorting it out themselves.	→	Self-reliant. Being handled feels like being managed.
Grew up watching institutions and promises fail.	→	Trust peer reviews and third-party proof, not your claims.
Came of age through recessions and 2008.	→	Financially cautious. Often wants the price before the tour.
First generation to research everything before even visiting.	→	Arrives informed, already comparing, already decided who is on the short list.

The Dark Funnel

The most consequential part of the journey happens before you know you are being considered.



Most of the decision is made before they even pick up the phone.

First human contact

Where in the journey the conversation begins and what it has to carry.

THE OLD MODEL Boomer adult child

First human contact was the beginning of the relationship.
A blank slate to educate and guide.



NOW Gen X adult child

First human contact comes later and carries far higher stakes: an informed, already-skeptical, actively-comparing decision-maker.



By the time they inquire, they are not at the top of your funnel. Their comparing finalists.

The Sandwich Squeeze

An overwhelmed, time-starved, financially anxious adult child.
Often a woman in peak career, carrying guilt in several directions.

What they are carrying — before they ever call you

51 average age of the U.S. family caregiver

54% of Americans in their 40s have both a parent 65+ and a dependent child

60% of sandwich caregivers are women, spending more hours per day than men

37 hrs **a week on the extra load, nearly a second full-time job**

THE HOLMES-RAHE STRESS SCALE, 1967

Score My Year

Sixty years of clinical use. Every major life event carries a point value. Here is mine.

Death of a close family member My dad — July 4	63
Major change in the health of a family member Dad's cancer. Mom's dementia. Both on February 6.	44
Major business readjustment I started my own company in January	39
Major change in financial state Two damaged houses and a business with no clients yet	38
Mortgage or loan for a major purchase The fixer-upper in New Jersey	31
Major change in responsibilities at work 30+ mystery shops, 14+ clients, 9 states	29
Major change in living conditions An empty apartment. An air mattress. Two and a half months.	25
Major change in working hours or conditions On a plane most weeks	20
Change in residence Seven moves. The scale counts it once.	20
TOTAL	**309**

MY TOTAL

309

Above 300 points, the scale puts the risk of a serious stress-related illness within the next two years at **about 80%**.

Under 150 — low susceptibility

150 to 300 — about a 50% chance

300 and above — about an 80% chance



Holmes TH & Rahe RH, "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale," Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 1967. Point values are the published instrument; the events counted are my own.

What the industry does with it — the chronic responsiveness problem

92%

of web inquiries go unanswered within 24 hours

80%
are never answered at all

54%
abandon when there is no clear path to a human

3
calls, on average, before a prospect reaches a live person

For this buyer, friction is not an inconvenience. It is a reason to stop and pivot.

Gen X do not want to be persuaded.

They want to be equipped to decide and want someone to understand their stressors.

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Six Conditions of GenX Trust

Meet them and you stay on the shortlist. Miss one and they are gone. Quietly, and without telling you why.

1

TRANSPARENCY

Price, up front

Vague or withheld pricing is not a late-stage detail. It reads as evasion and repels them early.

2

SPEED

A human, fast

Responsiveness works as a proxy for competence and respect. Delay signals how you will treat their parent.

3

EMPATHY

Real, not scripted

Gen X detects and rejects manufactured emotion. Genuine empathy converts; scripted warmth backfires.

4

NO PRESSURE

Guide, don't close

Push tactics that once accelerated Boomers actively drive this buyer away.

5

FACILITATION

A family, not a lead

You are helping a dispersed family reach consensus — not persuading one person in the room.

6

PROOF

Specifics they can verify

Assume you are being cross-shopped, and that they already know more than they are letting on.

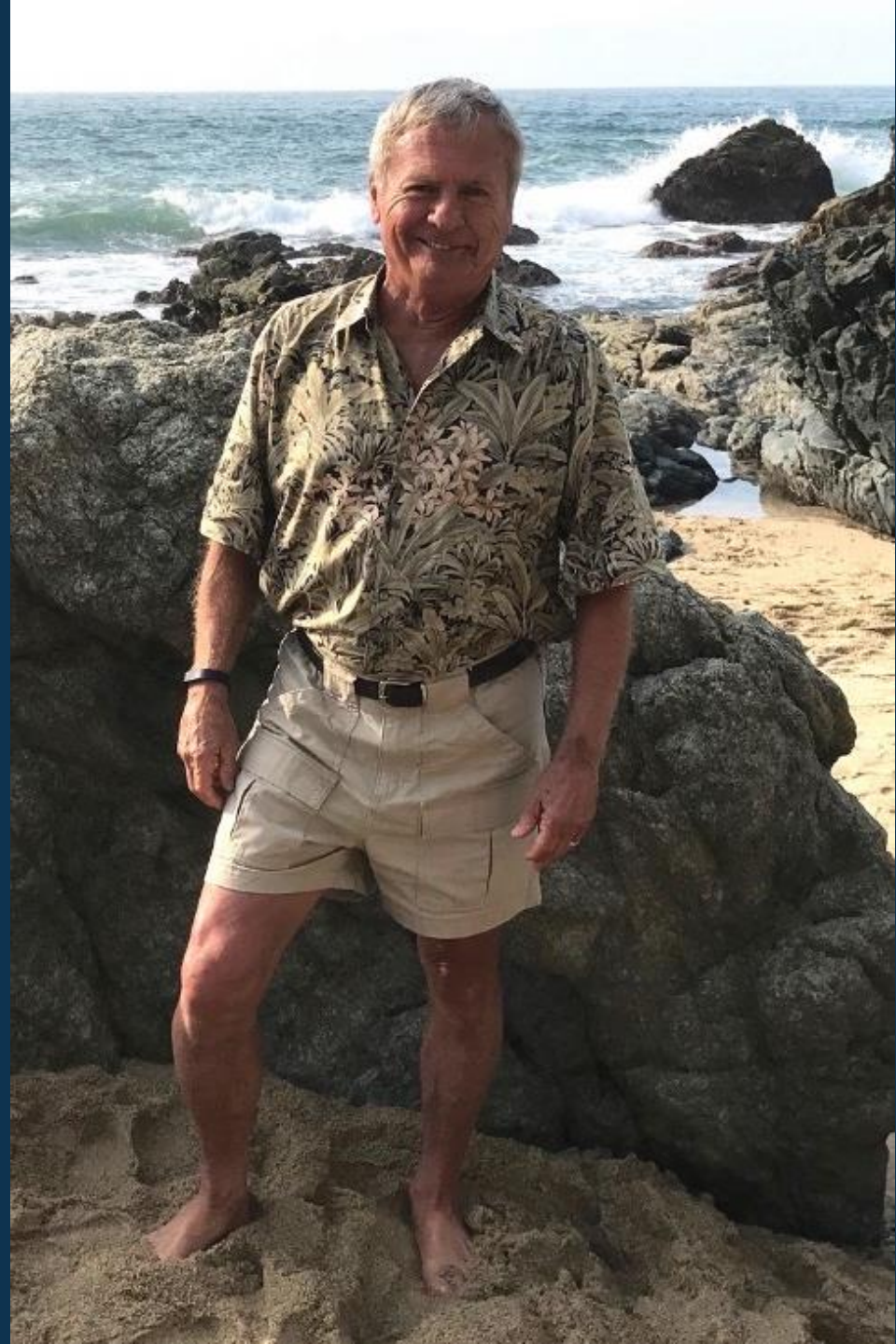
No one ever asked...

But what happens when you do?

“I vowed never to offer war stories about my experiences unless asked about them… Some have very interesting stories, but unfortunately younger generations are usually not interested..It's something most retirees need to be able to do.

Few have a forum in which to do it.”

— Ken Bailey, Serendipity: Taking Life as It Comes




Every family is going through
a hurricane of their own.
Ask. Listen. Learn their story.
Be the one who asked.