

Opening Interview with John Noltner Transcript

Amy Chatelaine: Hello, and welcome to Day Two. Today we're joined by Peace of My Mind's founder, John Noltner. I've invited John to answer a few questions about the stories you're about to hear before we go on our way.

Hi John, it's great to be with you as we begin.

John Noltner: Thanks Amy, it's good to be here with you. And it's good to be on this side of an interview for a change.

Amy Chatelaine: Well, on that note, the first question I have for you might sound familiar. If I didn't know anything about you, what would you want me to know?

John Noltner: There's always a hundred ways to answer this question. I'm a husband and father. I'm a photographer and a storyteller. I'm a wanderer with an almost insatiable curiosity about the world. And this is a bit of an outlier, but I'm also a Christmas tree farmer.

But I'd love to talk about why I love that question. Because a lot of the people I interview are not used to the experience, and sometimes I think that can be a little intimidating. But this is a question that allows people to position their best selves, you know? It empowers them to define their own narrative, and right out of the gates. It helps people feel comfortable, and it helps them feel heard.

Amy Chatelaine: Yeah, I love that.

Well, when you've written about your work, you've described the difference between what it means to be a tourist and what it means to be a pilgrim, and how that understanding has informed how you moved across the years and miles for this collection of stories. I'd love for you to talk about that a little bit as we begin this 40-day journey.

John Noltner: Yeah, you know, the very first interview I did for A Peace of My Mind was with a woman named Barbara Nordstrom-Loeb. And as we were lining up all the details by email, there was this quote in the signature of her emails.

It was by Andrew Schelling, from a book called *Meeting the Buddha*. And it said this, it said:

Only the walker who sets out toward ultimate things is a pilgrim. In this lies the difference between tourist and pilgrim:

The tourist travels just as far, sometimes with great zeal and courage, gathering up acquisitions, and returns the same person as the one who departed.

The pilgrim resolves that the one who returns will not be the same person as the one who set out. The pilgrim must be prepared to shed the husk of personality, or even the body, like a worn-out coat. For the pilgrim, the road is home. Reaching the destination seems nearly inconsequential.

You know, it turns out that that passage defined what I was setting out to do. I hadn't actually even seen it until a decade after that interview, when I was going back to some of the saved emails with Barbara.

Amy Chatelaine: Wow.

John Noltner: And there it was. And it turns out that it was just a lovely hint of what was to come.

Amy Chatelaine: Well, something else that has me thinking of... I guess, what role does rest play in the work of listening? And how would you say that's reflected in this offering?

John Noltner: Well, I think when we're doing hard things, it's good to be brave. But we also have to treat ourselves kindly in the process. You know, it's good to invest and spend ourselves, but then allow time for recovery and reflection. And throughout this project there's been a rhythm. There have been seasons: seasons of interviews and seasons of reflection, of editing, and then sharing those stories. And I've come to enjoy that rhythm.

And so I hope that this course can do that for others in this loud and busy world, that it can open us up to those rhythms. And that this course can be a season of your own journey.

But also, in the rhythm of the course itself, we've created pauses and integration days so that we can maybe model some of that process of stretching and then recentering, of reaching out and then looking within.

Amy Chatelaine: How did you go about finding these stories, John?

John Noltner: You know, I think finding the people is its own form of alchemy. It's a mixture of science and art, and it allows for the balance of research and whimsy, which sort of speaks to the journey itself.

So everywhere I go, I try to find an advocate or an ally, somebody on the ground with deep relationships who understands what we're trying to do, and then can introduce us to people in the community. So many of these interviews are deeply researched. And then every once in a while, things just sort of fall in our lap. Sometimes serendipity is a better partner than absolute control.

So it's good to be open to both. To do the hard work of preparing and researching, but then to remain open to the surprises that present themselves along the way.

Amy Chatelaine: And I guess before we head out on *our* way: what do you hope people take away from this offering?

John Noltner: I guess I hope that this course opens a space of curiosity in people. You know, I'm not big on creating five simple steps to success, or detailing the 12 habits of being a good person. Those sort of lists can be hard for me, but I get that the world likes them.

And so I've crafted a handful of takeaways that I hope get revealed in the process of this course. And here are three of them:

I hope that people will learn to listen deeply, to really pay close attention to what other people have to say.

I hope that folks will learn to challenge their own expectations. You know, sometimes we come at a situation and we think we know it and understand it. But when we pay attention, it can become something else.

And I hope that through this series of stories, people will make a commitment to stay at the table. That when things get difficult — and they will — that we can stay connected. We can stay engaged. And through that process, hope to find some sort of resolution to our challenges.

Amy Chatelaine: I think that's a great note to end on. May it be so. Thanks so much, John.

John Noltner: Thanks, Amy.

Amy Chatelaine: In John's interview process, it's important that each person feels deeply listened to.

When was a time you felt deeply listened to? And what did that make possible?

Before you go, take a few minutes to reflect with these prompts as you prepare to listen deeply to the stories ahead.

Thanks again for being here. We'll see you next time with our first story.