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50+Living our best lives now and in the future!

A Harvest of Words

Helen Laurence did not plan to be a poet; “it chose” her. When she was a child, she “loved the wordplay and sounds of nursery rhymes, ‘nonsense poetry,’ all the classics in verse and story” that she would “check out of the library at school or in town.”



As she grew older, Helen enjoyed studying works by Shakespeare, Whitman, and others. But it wasn’t until she started college that she eventually “surrendered to the lure of literature” as her primary focus. “I’d set myself on a career in medical technology since 7th grade and did not give up easily.”

A Growing Love of Literature

“Halfway through college, I saw that no matter how much I loved microbiology or physiology, it could not compare with my love for literature. Though I did not consider myself a writer at that time, later on, I saw that the study of great writing during undergraduate and graduate work prepared me for my life as a writer.” An additional influence later in my career was the study of sign language and my work as an interpreter.”

“Any foreign language study increases one’s facility with one’s native language, but the nature of signing, with its physical components, opened up my work and created more emphasis on the spaces between and among words.”

“What I love is the play of words, the attempt to suggest connections among seemingly disparate elements. Some writers, like May Sarton, are able to do a great job with all forms of writing, but poetry, memoir, and essay are my forte.”

Cottonwood Morning
in the ballet of breeze and poplar
of blue and cloud and meadow



the float of yellow leaf
informs this full morning
with the yearn of brilliance

Helen Laurence (November 2020)

Major Themes

Helen identifies as a “nature poet.” She also writes poems about social issues, family relationships, and womanhood and lesbian life paths. Much of her work “centers on the resonance between nature and the self.”



Her non-fiction work “includes much of the natural world.” She is also compiling a memoir that focuses on threads that contributed to her life as a writer. Another collection explores her “life as a lesbian from childhood to the present.”

Poetry as a Vocal Form

“Poetry has throughout time been a primarily vocal form of expression. Words on the page are a blessing in terms of preserving the poetry and making it available to others besides those of one’s village. But they are no substitute for the oral presentation. When a poet reads her work, she can convey the nuances of emphasis, the meaning carried by the pauses and punctuation, the luxurious nature of the sounds, and the intensity of the underlying experiences she herself has felt in order to create the work and hopefully convey these more fully to the audience.”

A Deeply Rooted Legacy

Before ‘retiring,’ Helen taught English at Umpqua Community College and coordinated a women’s studies course. Women and men who participated in a women’s studies course were introduced to “women’s history, achievements, struggles—economic, political, medical, academic, creative—and the fact that those struggles are far from over.” Helen also helped students understand the connection “between women’s issues and those of racism and classicism and so on.”

A New Chapter

Since leaving the classroom, Helen has focused on her writing—“compiling, collecting, and occasionally writing new pieces.” She also continues to give poetry readings and enjoys her friendships with “so many wonderful women.”

Helen recognizes that her “energy resources” are not what they once might have been. But whenever she writes, “all else falls away, and joy takes over.”

For Relaxation

Helen enjoys a year-round organic garden that she shares with her ‘landmates.’ “Right now, I have broccoli ready to pick, with another variety—overwintering purple broccoli which will begin to make its crop in February.” She also harvests celery, beets, carrots, and other crops during the cooler months.

When she is not tending to her garden, Helen enjoys swimming, camping, traveling, and reading. “Because my mobility is limited, my activities take me longer than they used to or are more restricted, but I am grateful I can still do all that I can.”



Advice for Others

“Overcome hesitation and do what you love. We’ve all been told this ad nauseum, but that’s because it is sound advice. I recently planned a trip which I almost didn’t take. I did go, and how very glad I am that I overcame my concerns.”

“Find the peace in your center, and don’t get caught up in all the horrendous news. As Naomi Shihab Nye, a great poet said, ‘Too much breaking news and you become broken.’”

Helen Laurence Poetry

Among other publications, Helen's poems have been published in *Manzanita Quarterly*, *Women and Environments International*, *Fireweed*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *We 'Moon*, and *Northridge Review*.

Keep Moving!

Harvard researchers [claim](#) “physical activity later in life shifts energy away from processes that can compromise health and toward mechanisms in the body that extend it. They hypothesize that humans evolved to remain physically active as they age — and in doing so to allocate energy to physiological processes that slow the body's gradual deterioration over the years.”



Staying physically active and engaging in cardio and strength-building activities are important as we move through our fifties, sixties, seventies, and beyond. The benefits of exercise are worth the effort:

- The [World Health Organization](#) reports that physically active *women* may experience increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Appreciating our surroundings with new eyes when taking [walks](#) can increase our sense of positivity and well-being. Researchers suggest that exercise and a stronger sense of [purpose](#) are connected.
- [Outdoor](#) exercise such as walking or hiking in a forest may boost our health and spirits.
- [Exercise](#) helps our heart, and muscle-strengthening exercises specifically reduce the risk for falls.

- Sufficient and appropriate activity can help us maintain more [muscle](#) and allow us to remain more independent as we age.
- Daily exercise may [lower blood pressure](#).
- Regular physical activity could [reduce the risk](#) for some illnesses and diseases, including certain [cancers](#).

Before starting or intensifying a regular exercise program, make sure your plan is appropriate for your overall health and fitness. Talk with your healthcare provider for guidance.

Poetry, Well-Being & Resilience

The International Arts + Mind Lab at The Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics [reports](#) that poetry is good for our well-being and “can provide comfort and boost mood during periods of stress, trauma, and grief.”

Poetry can also [help improve](#) “emotional resilience and decreases anxiety.”

Resilience and Aging Well

In Western culture, aging has traditionally been “associated with disability, frailty, and overall decline in physical, mental, and social functioning.” But according to a recent [article](#) published in the *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, research on resilience is changing this view. Cultivating resilience can result in greater well-being as we age, and even late-life individuals who demonstrate high resiliency can maintain “psychological stability” regardless of circumstances. Further, high resilience has also been [significantly associated](#) with “successful aging, lower depression, and longevity.”

Resilience Described



Resilience is generally described as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship

problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.” Psychiatrist Helen Lavretsky says in her book, *Resilience and Aging Research and Practice*, that “in a broad sense, resilience refers to the ability to maintain biological and psychological homeostasis under stress (pg.2).”

Developing Resiliency

Resiliency has been linked to optimism, emotional regulation, personal agency, purpose in life, and positive relations with others, and viewing difficulties as opportunities to learn, among other behaviors. The American Psychological Association offers various suggestions for cultivating resiliency, including:

- Connecting with “empathetic and understanding people.”
- Taking care of your physical health
- Practicing mindfulness such as journaling, yoga, prayer, or meditation and “ruminate on positive aspects of your life.”
- Maintaining a hopeful outlook rather than “worrying about what you fear.”
- Learning from previously challenging experiences.

Continuing to develop resilience can help all of us live our best lives now and in the future. We can also serve as positive aging role models for younger generations as we live our best lives.

AmazonSmile Program

At no cost to you, Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to a charity you choose if you start shopping at smile.amazon.com. One of the charities listed on AmazonSmile is the **Friends of Ford’s Pond**. (See the October Boomer Best U [Newsletter](#).)

A New Age-Friendly Beginning?

Nearly half of working baby boomers would like to change jobs or careers. At the same time, many employers cannot find enough workers to fill open positions.



If you are looking for an age-friendly workplace or want to support age-friendly businesses, check out the [Age-Friendly Institute](#) for a list of certified employers.

For the past 15 years, The Age-Friendly Institute has been certifying “the best places to work for employees 50+.” Certified employers “value employees based on proficiency, qualifications, and contributions.” In addition, these employers “maintain policies, practices, and programs supporting people age 50+.”

Boomer Best U Newsletter

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