



# Boomer Best U



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

## Embracing Her Destiny as a Poet and Educator

Published in various literary magazines, Nancy Nowak is a lifelong poet. She began writing poetry in elementary school. "Then, writing meant playing with words as other kids might with crayons." She continued writing throughout her junior and senior years. When she was a high school senior, she co-edited her school's literary magazine.



Nowak had two instructors who "confirmed my fate was poetry during my college years: Robert Vas Dias was friends with a range of American poets he invited to campus to read and visit classes, and Barbara Gibson taught me about writing as a woman. I did not write to 'express my emotions' as much as to use words—too often wielded as weapons to do harm—to create understanding, not just for myself, but to move others to feel and understand."

### The Joy of Writing, Learning, and Teaching

"After a few post-college years of enjoyable drifting, I fulfilled three goals: to live in New York City, work in a book store, and write."

Entering into a "well-regarded MFA program" at Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, New York, Nowak "wrote steadily, read extensively, and learned constantly" from her teachers. While a graduate student, she discovered that she enjoyed teaching as a result of organizing special seminars for undergraduate students.

### Discovering an Enduring Love and a Shared Passion for the Arts

In 1981, Nancy Nowak met Jon Leach, a gifted artist who eventually became her life partner. She recalls their first date was at the White Horse Tavern. On the wall behind where they sat was a



photo of renowned Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. That photo "cast its spell." In 1983, the couple married.

Eventually, Nancy and her husband moved to Southern Oregon so she could teach full-time and he could devote himself to painting. Umpqua Community College (UCC) "had a developmental education department, which delighted me—precollege writing classes were not some lower rungs on the English Department's ladder." In 1994, she started her new life as a full-time educator.

## Life as a full-time College Educator

As an associate professor at UCC, Nowak "taught mostly basic writing courses, study skills, and college success. Occasionally students would inform me my writing courses 'didn't count.' I'd tell them that their final grade *would* count toward their GPA, and even though the classes were not transferable, the skills I taught should be. One student, as he moved through the writing sequence, would manage to find me—usually when I was on the Fitness Center treadmill—each quarter to reassure me that I'd actually been right about what a thesis statement was."



Nowak assumed additional responsibilities at her college, including the role of Faculty Association President. Even though she was aware that her efforts "might be frustrated or frustrate her colleagues," she "hoped to contribute to the health of the college."

## A Mass Shooting on Campus and a Final Year of Teaching

On October 1, 2015, a UCC student fatally shot his English teacher and then killed eight of his classmates and wounded several more before taking his own life. This devastating event marked the beginning of Nowak's last year at the college.

"After the shooting, I was unable to return to a poem I'd begun to draft in September or to imagine ever writing again. I did read poems I'd cherished, needing the solace and understanding of others' words. During that difficult fall quarter, I found myself jotting down phrases and images—the river below campus, the thousand cranes sent to the college from another community that had experienced gun violence—with no plan for what I would do with them. Poet and essayist Adrienne Rich wrote, 'Poems are like dreams: in them, you put what you don't know you know.'"

"After fall quarter ended, I began a poem that attempted to express the particular grief felt by those who were part of the campus community. In the spring of 2016, I read that poem, 'Dark River, Wings of Glass' as part of a Faculty Lecture Series." From the responses she received, Nancy "felt the work had moved" through her "to reach and touch others."



## An Unexpected Post-Retirement Life

After leaving her teaching career in 2016, Nowak began volunteering for causes that were important to her, such as serving on a library board. Three years later, her husband became ill, and on February 24, 2020, he died. This loss was "complicated by the pandemic's arrival. Remembering Jon, "We appreciated and supported one another as partners and artists. We enjoyed being together."

## Advice for Others

"I would encourage others to seek out poetry, especially if their last experiences with poems were in high school and involved dissecting them like worms in biology class. A good place to begin is by subscribing to the Poem-a-Day website offered by poets.org. Each day a poem chosen by a contemporary poet will arrive in your mailbox, along with some biographical information and links to related work. The daily poem may comfort, inform, puzzle, or dazzle you, offering the kind of challenge that's good for the mind and spirit. If it encourages you to start writing, whether in a journal or poetry, that is a way of joining a new community."

## Evening

By Nancy Nowak

See how our black cat  
curled asleep on a quilt, white-  
tipped paw, bib's spilt cream  
just showing, calms nightfall to  
the rhythm of her breathing.



## Celebrate National Poetry Month

April is National Poetry Month. Check out the National Today [website](#) for information about the history of poetry, interesting facts, ways to celebrate poetry in April, and the benefits of reading or writing poetry. Two of the benefits mentioned include increased critical thinking and emotional benefits, such as greater emotional control and trauma healing.

An interesting [article](#) published in the *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* journal suggests that the emotional rewards of poetry may be underappreciated because of both limited exposure during childhood and adolescence and often "too analytical an approach."



April is an ideal month to embrace poetry, a rich form of expression with ancient roots. Challenge yourself to read, write, or learn how poetry can enhance your [well-being](#) this month.

### Emotional Regulation and Stroke Risk

As we age, our risk of stroke increases. [Researchers in Ireland](#) examined 13,462 cases of acute stroke from 32 countries. The average age of the stroke patients in the study was sixty-two.

The team found that anger or emotional upset was linked to an approximately 30% increase in the risk of stroke one hour after an episode. Our emotional wellbeing matters.



### Our Planet, Our Health, & Elder Climate Activists

April 7 was World Health Day. The World Health Organization (WHO) published a [warning](#) about the

relationship of our health to the health of our planet. WHO "estimates that more than 13 million deaths around the world each year are due to environmental causes," including our global climate crisis.

If little or nothing is done, the climate crisis will have an even greater adverse effect on our grandchildren and future generations. If you would like to be involved with a group of elders advocating for climate crisis action, visit the [Elders Climate Action website](#) and check out some of the ways you can make a difference. One of the actions available is to sign a petition asking AARP leadership to get involved. You can also join a local group, support specific efforts, and donate using a credit card or Pay Pal.



Within less than five minutes, I found three actions I could immediately take as an elder concerned about our planet, the health of people living today, and the health of future generations. Together, we can make a difference.

### Information You Can Use

Ben James, CFA, CFP, founder of Elevate Wealth



Advisors, and author of [The Playbook: 7 Fundamentals of Financial Planning](#), offered information on The Playbook Process and discussed Social Security (including myths and information about the past,

present, and possible future). If you missed this informative session, you can still access the webinar video on The Elevate Wealth Advisor's website.

Future learning opportunities will be recorded and available at your convenience. For additional learning opportunities, check out [Elevate Wealth Advisor's YouTube Channel](#). In the latest short video (6:20 minutes), Ben explains four things to address in your financial Playbook in the first quarter.

## Irrelevant? We're Just Getting Started!

When women start losing their youthful looks and after men and women retire, something peculiar happens; those of us who are older or retired are often treated like we are less relevant. As far as some people are concerned, we've had our day, and now it is time for us to move out of the way. While such thinking did have some validity a century ago, members of today's 50+ population have a good chance of living into their nineties and beyond. At 50, many of us were just getting started with the second half of our lives. At 60, others will only be at the midpoint of their adult lives. At 70, some may have an equivalent of their career years remaining.

We cannot let others define us or confine us to certain roles assigned to our grandparents and great-grandparents. We are pioneering what aging looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We all have the power to define ourselves and to feel relevant and visible. How we choose to make our presence known is up to us.

## Feeling Invisible after Fifty? Try Changing Your Clothes!

*By Cindy Eastman*

My husband and I have been Airbnb hosts for years and have welcomed visitors into our home from places like Switzerland, Germany, S. Korea, and Nigeria, to name a few. Our most recent guest is a young nurse originally from Imo state in Nigeria, but she is now making her home in Charlotte, N.C., with her husband and two young daughters. Her name is Chimwanya “Chi-Chi” Armadi.



## Nigerian Fashion and Rural Culture

Chimwanya and I had gotten close during her stay, and she lovingly arranged an African outfit for me from her tailor in Nigeria. She ordered it around

Christmas time, and it arrived around St. Patrick's Day. I tried it on and showed her, and we both jumped up and down with joy that it fit. I was planning to go out to a restaurant, so naturally, I left my new clothes on.

Most people in my rural community dress quite casually when eating out. A clean flannel shirt and kicking the mud off your steel-toed boots before entering an establishment may mean you're appropriately dressed.

## A Local Restaurant & Making the Rounds

I made quite a scene in a local restaurant upon entry, especially since my favorite business client was there along with his group.

He howled with delight and insisted he needed the exact same outfit made for him. I told him, "Yes, just send over your measurements, and I'll pass them on to a tailor in Nigeria." After that, there was no getting around the many curious questions each diner had about my outfit, Airbnb hosting, and the young woman residing with me.



It was a fun evening. So, if anyone wants advice from me, I'd simply say two things: First, if you're a bit shy, do something outside your own walls. Second, if you're feeling invisible, like many of us do after 50, just change your clothes. And go out and wear those clothes proudly, like you're wearing a road sign right along the freeway: Loud and proud.

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