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## **Becoming a Sociologist: Insights about Racism, Youth, Grandparenting & More**

Retired sociologist Dr. Emery Smith confessed that he once wanted to be a psychologist. But for him, it didn't answer the questions he was asking. "Also, I looked around, and I noticed all the psychologists I met were a little odd, and I didn't know if odd people went into psychology and got weirder or if weird people went into psychology. I finally decided that weird people went into psychology and got weirder, so I switched to sociology. Then I found out that sociology was no different."



Smith describes his chosen career field as one that "draws on all of the social sciences to answer nearly any question a researcher may ask. In order to study humans, sociology combines psychology, history, anthropology, economics, communication, etc., in unique ways so that all of them can be used together to try to look at the big picture. I would also add that the main task of sociology is to connect personal life (the micro) to larger processes (the macro). That is the sociological perspective - to help humans understand how the larger world affects their lives and vice versa. It can be very empowering."

## **Seeking to Understand**

Smith applied his expertise as a researcher, consultant, and educator. "I started out researching racism, specifically Nazis and skinheads - a very relevant topic today. I worked on child-rearing research at the Oregon Social Learning Center and various projects there and with Northwest Survey and Data Services, where I was a Senior Partner and Consultant. My primary interests were in positive parenting and discipline. Later I worked on things like student persistence and success, and I continued to work on understanding racism, especially in educational settings. Economic inequality has also been a research topic that interested me, relating to student success for students suffering from intergenerational poverty."

## **Going Where Few Would Ever Go**

When working on his doctoral dissertation in 2000, Smith attended an Aryan Nations Conference and interviewed attendees. "As an ally to brown people, it was very hard. I hated what they stood for and loathed much of what they said and did. But I knew the work was important, so I stuck with it, even when a skinhead offered to enroll me in the 'Doctor Marten' dental plan (kick my teeth in). I took precautions, but some of my subjects were very violent and very angry. I learned to leave a situation when the first skinhead left and to never go alone to

any Nazi or skinhead gathering. I also learned to get the support of the leaders so the less savvy racist would leave me alone. That's a long story, but if the boss says to leave you alone, most of them leave you alone. Not all, but most."

The insights Smith gained from his Aryan Nations experience were "too numerous to list here, but one main discovery was that they were all afraid of being replaced (sound familiar?) and wanted to return to a mythical time when everything was great for white people."

### **How Our Ancestors' Traumas Can Affect Us Today**

Another of Smith's research interests involved epigenetics. "Our genome does not change from one generation to the next. Our epigenome, the genetic system that affects how our genes express themselves, can change in one generation. The first research was done on Jewish holocaust survivors. I was interested because my wife was Native American, and the problems with violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and the like are rife in Native communities. Coping mechanisms, the way we respond to trauma, and many other problems shared by Natives can be explained if we understand that the trauma suffered by our ancestors can affect us, often in very negative ways. Poverty causes much trauma, so epigenetics helps explain why people whose families have been poor for generations react and respond in ways that are not amenable to academic success."

### **Youth and Hope for the Future**

"I have a lot of faith in our young people. Many seem to understand the nature and seriousness of the problems we face today: climate, economic inequality, racism, and the like. They are generally less racist than past generations and more likely to care about people who are not like them. They are the future, and I wish we had left them more to work with. Elders can respect our young people and let them know that. We can step aside and let them do

what they see fit. In my case, I take care of babies, so my adult children have more time and energy to make the world a better place for their children. Trust them; they know what kind of world they want to build."

### **Enjoying a New Chapter**



"I have three grandchildren I watch four days a week, so most of my research these days is on positive parenting and how to change a diaper. I am enjoying being retired."

Smith also likes spending time with family, taking walks, practicing Yang-style tai chi (and learning Chen style), and playing the banjo. "Other than that, I just love my grandbabies and enjoy helping them discover the world."

### **Advice**

"If you want to get old, sit down. If not, keep moving physically and mentally. Accept that life will change, and go with it. Get to know some young people and listen to them. Try some new things; don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself. If you don't have a spiritual life, get one. I still try to be a better person today than I was yesterday, and it's not always easy. Love without expectations, and just behave (an old Native man gave me that tip). Always be teachable. It's not the same world we grew up in. Accept that and figure out how to navigate it as it is. Know that the "good old days" were not all that good for everyone, and the best days are likely to be ahead. I try to remember that I hope to leave the best legacy I can. The main thing is to find something in your life that gives it meaning."



## Tai Chi for Improved Health and Well-being after Fifty

The [Tai Chi for Health Institute](#) describes this discipline as a "moving meditation in the form of a series of gentle exercises that create harmony between the mind and body. The ultimate purpose is cultivating our inner life energy (qi) to flow smoothly and powerfully through the body."



### What is the difference between the Chen and Yang styles?

According to [Tama Martial Arts](#), "The philosophy beyond the Chen style is that movements focusing on yield should be soft, while movements counter-attacking should be explosive and fast." The "Yang style focuses on the same movements and sequences as Chen...but "everything is soft, and the speed is uniform throughout the form. To that end, the Yang style form is usually executed much more slowly, overall, than is the Chen Style." Check this [Youtube video](#) out to view both styles side-by-side.

### What are Some Benefits of Practicing Tai Chi?

Tai Chi is ideal for older adults because the movements are gentle. [Healthline](#) reports that Tai Chi offers many benefits. In particular, this discipline "focuses on muscle control, stability, balance, and flexibility." Regular practice can also help reduce the likelihood of falling and may help reduce certain types of pain.

## The Spirit of Christmas Past



Located above the historic Oregon City Municipal Elevator, [Elevate Wealth Advisors](#) is celebrating another Christmas season with an original [Meier and Frank](#) animated holiday window display, courtesy of Cyrus and [The Party Factory](#).

Meier and Frank was once a premier department store in downtown Portland, Oregon. It was first established in 1857. In the 1950s, the store created Santaland and also featured The Twelve Days of Christmas animated window displays. This tradition continued until 2006.

In addition to **Christmas**, a Christian tradition remembering the birth of Christ on December 25, both Hanukkah and Kwanzaa will be celebrated this month.

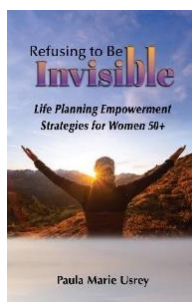
**Hannukah** is an eight-day Jewish "festival of lights" recalling the 2<sup>nd</sup> century reclamation of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; it will be celebrated this year from December 18<sup>th</sup> through the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>.



**Kwanzaa** is an African-American cultural holiday that celebrates African heritage and identity; it begins on December 26<sup>th</sup> and ends on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

## Life Planning Empowerment Strategies for the New Year

Paula Marie Usrey



I am pleased to announce that my first book, *Refusing to Be Invisible: Life Planning Empowerment Strategies for Women 50+*, is now [available through Amazon](#) (print and eBook versions). If you have a Kindle Unlimited subscription, you can download it for free.

This first book was a passion project for me. I wanted to provide women 50+ with additional tools to live an increasingly more empowered life in the coming decades. I believe my mission has been accomplished.

*I am deeply indebted to so many of you who read drafts, offered feedback, and contributed to this book. Thank you all for helping make this project a reality.*

## Flaxseeds and Your Health

In an [article](#) for the Mayo Clinic, Katherine Zeratsky, R.D., L.D. notes ground flaxseed can be used to improve “digestive health or relieve constipation.” Also, because flaxseeds are high in fiber and omega-3 acids, they may “help lower total blood cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL or ‘bad’) cholesterol levels.”

Whole flaxseed can be ground in a food processor or coffee grinder. Ground flaxseed can easily be added when baking, stirred into yogurt, or added to cereal. According to Zeratsky, one tablespoon contains about 37 calories.

## Looming Cuts for Medicare Physician Reimbursements



Physicians may face combined Medicare reimbursement cuts of nearly **8.5%** beginning January 1, 2023. The effect of this projected reduction could mean fewer doctors may be willing or able to accept Medicare patients.

The Supporting Medicare Providers Act of 2022 was introduced in the House on September 13, 2022. This bill would **reduce** cuts through 2023. If Congress does not act, the current fee reimbursement schedule will expire at the end of this month.

## Musical Training in Later Life



Studying music is not a discipline reserved just for the young. Musical training has demonstrated benefits for older adults as well.

In an [article](#) for *Psychology Today*, Shahram Heshmat, Ph.D., suggests that musical training could be “a non-pharmacological intervention to stave off age-related declines.” Further, Heshmat claims that “musical training contains all the elements of a cognitive training program—concentrated attention, memory, and self-discipline.”

As [Reported](#) in *Human Brain Mapping*, a peer-reviewed journal, older adults in a study that involved learning a musical instrument demonstrated increased neural efficiency. They also showed “improved behavioral performances in non-musical verbal memory.”

It might be time to dust off the piano keys, dig out that old band instrument, or buy that violin you always wanted to play. In addition to demonstrated cognitive benefits, musical training can give you a sense of joy and accomplishment.

## Healthy Habits Assessment for a New Year\*

On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is excellent), rate how well you believe you are practicing good health habits in each of the following areas:

- Healthy diet (appropriate portions, limited processed foods, enough fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, etc.)
- Sufficient intake of water
- No tobacco
- No or moderate alcohol consumption
- Routine medical exams
- Routine strength exercises
- Routine stretching
- Routine balance work
- Routine cardio workouts (as approved by your doctor)
- Regular, sufficient sleep
- Regular meditation or other stress management activities as appropriate

\*From *Refusing to Be Invisible*, Chapter Twelve, “A Post-Career Planning Guide: Embracing Our Power.”

Boomer Best U does not provide medical, dietary, legal, or financial advice. As appropriate, consult your doctor, a legal professional, or a financial expert when considering health-related, legal, or financial changes.

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