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

From an International Research Perspective on Aging to a Personal Re-Invention After Sixty

Jem Golden has a unique international view of aging, disabilities, and inclusion because he has lived in various countries, served as an international consultant partly addressing these issues, lived with a rare genetic condition that created “a sense of aging” before his time, and then re-invented himself in his sixties and is now diving even more deeply into issues related to his primary interests.



Fond London Childhood Memories

He fondly remembers his London childhood, which involved spending time with his grandparents, great-uncles, and aunts—individuals he saw as warm, curious, and full of vitality. “We never used the word ‘old’ in my household. We were all just people accepting one another.”

Observations While Living in Japan

After graduating with a degree in Japanese Studies and Modern History in 1983, he moved to Japan and spent over four years there.

While in Japan, he observed, “Japanese media reporting in universally negative terms ‘about the ‘demographic timebomb’ involving people over 65 who would soon represent most of the population...”

Moving to Dublin and Serving as a Senior International Consultant

Golden earned two master's degrees and moved to Dublin, Ireland, in 2008 to be with his future wife. While in his position as a senior consultant for “the world’s largest independent strategic consultancy firm, Golden had numerous opportunities to “analyze the long-term implications of aging societies and consumers...I was struck (despite my positive advocacy) that clients, almost without exception, characterized aging customers as a ‘problem’ or even a mystery, not an opportunity...”

In workplace environments, he observed, “management sees older people as ‘more expensive, less flexible, and less energetic, relatively. It is not only older people but people with disabilities...these individuals are discriminated heavily against, especially for hiring, and are seen as liabilities, not assets to the organization.”

Golden noted that as he consulted in the travel and tourism industry, most businesses “were not prepared to rethink their strategies” for older

consumers and those who experienced one or more disabilities even though they “represented around 30% of the customer base.”

A Genetic Condition and Empathy with Aging

Beginning in his early forties, Golden developed a chronic genetic condition called Erosive Osteoarthritis (EOA). This condition destroys “all the cartilage...as if devoured by a hungry barracuda. Walking is difficult, especially in urban environments.” This condition has given him “a sense of ‘aging before my time...and has made him “very empathetic and attuned to the barriers facing older adults and people with disabilities.”

Golden researches and writes numerous [articles](#) on the need to make cities and communities much more “age-friendly” by incorporating modest, imaginative design changes...”



“Street furniture is one of my advocacy passions, and I have written a lot about urban spaces being ‘rest friendly,’ especially for older people to replenish and socialize.”

Re-Invention in His Sixties

Within the last few years, Golden left his full-time, demanding consulting position to work for himself. He does research and consultancy projects for NGOs, academic institutions, and corporations, including “consulting for the travel and hospitality sector.” He also lectures at the University College Dublin, teaches courses on disability, social services, and social policy in Ireland, and provides dissertation supervision. “It is an unexpected change of direction for me and is very satisfying!”

One of his NGO projects involved helping Fighting Blindness to host a [global event](#) in Dublin in June. Part of his work with this organization involved grant writing and getting sponsorships for a “Public Patient Involvement Breakout Workshop Event.” Golden recognizes that his ‘freelance’ work isn’t always straightforward and does require “a degree of reinvention.” However, he notes that professionally, “this has been the richest (in a spiritual sense) and

most satisfying period of my life—and it is continuing and growing.”

Researching Dementia and Prevention

Within the last few years, Golden was involved in a six-month qualitative research project studying an innovative dementia support program in South Tipperary, Ireland. The consensus supported helping people with dementia remain in their homes as long as possible. One innovation involved engaging the patient in meaningful weekly activities such as going out for coffee, singing in a choir, or looking at photos together.

Music and the Brain

“I took up piano in my fifties and acoustic guitar in my sixties; it always amazes me the profound effect that playing even for ten minutes or so has on my concentration levels and memory improvement (not to mention an uplift in mood). It is striking to note the vast amount of research showing the [impact](#) playing an instrument has on the analytical brain. Please try not to think of these routines as simply ‘practicing’—you are not practicing; you are playing and immersed in a lovely mist of sound you created.” Also, [listening to music](#), especially favorite pieces with strong autobiographic connotations, is very good for the aging brain.”



For Relaxation

“My rules for relaxing (which sounds like a paradox) is don’t do things where devices need to be switched on, and no screens; try not to get hung up about time, and never worry about where you are good at it; focus on being good at having fun.” Golden enjoys cooking, playing the acoustic guitar or piano, and writing cards by hand “on a *real* greeting card (radical).”

Advice for Others

“I am reluctant to give ‘advice’ to people. However, I recommend remaining open to still learning, whatever age you are; it makes your precious analytical brain feel fresh...”

A Joyful Way to Enhance Brain Functioning

In a September 2024 article titled “How Singing Does Extraordinary Things to Our Brain,” Gem Golden discusses findings from two studies indicating that singing can help improve memory and brain functioning. Click this [article link](#) for more information.

“Of All the Things I’ve Lost, I Miss My Mind the Most”

My late father-in-law used to have a plaque in his garage with the image of a befuddled older man and a quote attributed to Mark Twain: “Of all the things



I’ve lost, I miss my mind the most.” The sign was meant to be funny, but losing one’s mind to dementia is anything but humorous.

Some Hard Truths about Dementia

According to the [Alzheimer's Association](#), about 1 in 9 people 65 and older (10.9%) are living with Alzheimer’s. Seventy-three percent of those afflicted are 75 or older., and “almost two-thirds of Americans with Alzheimer’s are women.”

The [National Library of Medicine](#) reported that in 2019, the average cost of care for a person with dementia was \$81,000 per year (less an approximate \$31,000 for unpaid care). The financial and emotional toll that dementia could take on individuals and families cannot be understated.

Potentially Preventable

A July 2024 [article](#) in the journal *The Lancet Neurology*, it was suggested that **up to 45% of dementia cases are “potentially preventable.”**

Knowing and managing 14 risk factors that are generally under our control can help protect us. These risk factors include **lower levels of education, hearing loss, hypertension, smoking, obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, excessive alcohol consumption, traumatic brain injury, air pollution, social isolation (loneliness), untreated vision loss, and elevated LDL cholesterol.** “Out of all 14 risk factors, those tied to the greatest proportion of dementia in the global population are [hearing impairment](#) and high LDL cholesterol, along with less education in early life and social isolation in later life.”

A separate [study](#) linked sleep apnea with cognitive decline in men. Sleep apnea is a treatable condition. In another [study](#), findings revealed that even people with a genetic variant associated with dementia were 49.8% less likely to develop it when they held a favorable view toward aging than those with a negative attitude. In addition, as reported by [CNN Health](#), research has also linked lower levels of purpose in life with mild cognitive impairment.

Keeping our minds engaged, practicing a healthy lifestyle, embracing a positive attitude toward aging, and having a sense of purpose could be among the best preventative measures for staying sharp as we age.

Pets & Lower Dementia Risk

Citing various studies, the [American Psychiatric Association](#) suggested that older adults who live alone could lower their risk of dementia by owning a dog. Pet ownership typically involves taking the dog for walks, which may also include opportunities for

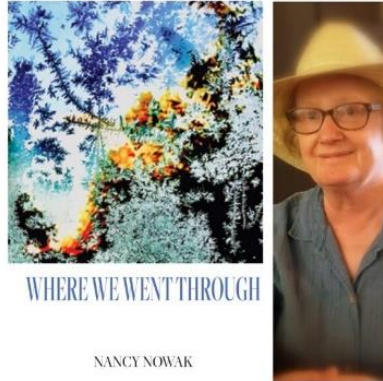


socialization. Both exercise and socialization are known dementia risk-reduction activities.

Poet Announces New Chapbook

Nancy Nowak, featured in the [April 2022 Boomer Best U Newsletter](#),

has continued to share her inspiring poetry in numerous journals and anthologies. She recently announced her chapbook, *Where We Went Through*. This work “traces a journey through landscapes, physical and emotional. Two people begin the journey, but after the loss of one, the other who remains enters sorrow alone.”



This chapbook will be released on November 29, 2024, for \$17.99. However, it can be pre-ordered for \$15.99 until October 4, 2024. Purchases can be made online through [Finishing Line Press](#).

World Gratitude Day

Saturday, September 21, is World Gratitude Day. It was first celebrated in 1965 during a gathering in Hawaii on Thanksgiving Day by the United Nations Meditation Group, led by Sri Chinmoy.

Expressing gratitude is a powerful way to foster a sense of well-being, strengthen relationships, and positively impact mental health.

Regardless of what might be going on in our lives at any particular time, we all have much to be thankful for—each breath, each smile we exchange, each sunrise we enjoy, each word of encouragement, each memory we savor—and so much more.

Sharing Your Gratitude



We all have people for whom we are grateful. (Many of us also have pets we are thankful to have in our lives.) If you would like to thank a particular person or honor a precious pet for the difference they made in your life, consider buying a commemorative brick that will be placed on the plaza above the historic Oregon City Elevator (at the end of the Oregon Trail). A 4” x 8” brick costs \$100, and an 8” x 8” brick costs \$300. For more information, [click here](#).

Vision, Purpose & Legacy

When two national park rangers moved into a rural community, they asked why no parks were near their neighborhood. They were told the neighborhood was designed for older adults, so no parks would be needed. Why would anyone think that older adults wouldn’t need parks? [Jim and Beth Houseman](#) drew community members together and provided the leadership needed to establish an accessible, intergenerational community park and recreational area.

After years of hard work and a community-wide and city effort, the Houseman’s vision is a reality. Ford’s Pond Recreation Area The park offers paved walking and hiking trails for all ages and abilities, water activities, and a new playground area for children. It was officially dedicated on September 6, 2024.



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