

SUNSET YEARS



POEMS FOR SENIORS WHO STILL
LOVE LIFE AND EACH OTHER

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1 Introduction

Being Old Isn't What It Used to Be. It's A Whole Lot Better!

The sun on the cover of this book explodes with energy, color, vitality, and purpose. It animates every corner of the sky around it. Even after this sun recedes beyond the horizon, its brilliant red glow will continue to adorn the edge of the skyline. That energy, drive, and continual striving are what animate the twenty-first century approach to aging.

These poems are the story of our family and life. They are also the story of this new approach. Too many in prior generations regarded their senior years as a period of decline. They felt their best days had passed. They settled for less. You don't have to.

If you, like my wife and me, were born between January 1, 1946, and December 31, 1964, you are a part of the generation of Americans known as the Baby Boomers. Our extra-large cohort of individuals has overwhelmed and ended up redefining American culture at every stage of their life journey.

In our early years, Boomers overburdened and forced a rethinking of America's institutions of education and higher learning. In our twenties through sixties, Boomers made our country reconsider what working life should or could be. Now, as we reach retirement, we are forcing a rethinking of what it means to be living out one's "sunset years" as well.

You don't need to be a Baby Boomer to embrace this new approach to aging. You just need to live each day as though the greatest passions, achievements, and opportunities of your life may still lie ahead of you.

Never stop striving, never stop dreaming, never stop achieving. That is the true secret of life. That is the message of these poems.

Come feel what it's like to still love someone passionately even after fifty years of marriage. Come explore the richness and sometimes silliness of life in general, especially family life. Come to the gym with us. Set goals, fight through setbacks, test yourself, redefine yourself, become the You you've always wanted to be.

The final two stanzas of the title poem of this collection, "Sunset Years," sum up this new approach to aging:

*So will you go out
Weak and sorry?
Or will your sunset years
Be a blaze of glory?*

*For you still decide
Where your future lies.
Be technicolor clouds exploding
Against crimson sunset skies.*

Life can be an exciting journey in your senior years. Let these poems show you all this last phase of your life can be.

2 Poems for Seniors Who Still Love Each Other

My wife, Diane, and I are in our seventies. Most of our friends are seventy or even older. What does it mean to love someone in your senior years? Is it a lukewarm, more like roommates, “too much trouble to change so might as well stay together situation?” Or can your long years of being together make you even more passionate about and devoted to each other?

The poems in this section celebrate our fifty years as a married couple and the love that has made our life together still an adventure to this day. They also celebrate the type of love of life and each other that I believe is the hallmark of the twenty-first century approach to life in one’s sunset years.

Whatever your age is, I hope you enjoy these poems. Most importantly, especially if you, like us, are in your senior years, I hope you can use these poems to tell the person you love how special they are to you. I hope they remind both of you just how lucky you are to have each other in your lives.

Still The One

You fret because
You're seventy.
Hon you still look
Great to me.

You've got a few wrinkles,
Some new curves too.
But I like this older
Version of you.

We've loved each other
For fifty years.
Faced life good and bad
Its laughter, its tears.

Our grandkids laugh,
Because I still hold your hand.
But you still light me up
Like a rock concert band.

Yes, it's true,
Our bodies do look old.
But our life, our love
Is still hot, fresh, bold.

I love the warmth of you
Pressed full against me.
And that we still know
Love's ecstasy.

I still think about you
When we're apart.
You're still the one
Written on my heart.

You're my history, my destiny.
And when my days are done,
My last words will be:
"You're still the one."

The Look

What should I do today?
Work out? Read a book?
Then suddenly I see it,
You have “The Look.”

Under thirties see us only
As Grandma and Grandad.
With arthritis, pill bottles
And knees that are bad.

They can’t envision our
Hearts still full of passion.
They see only our wrinkles
And clothes out of fashion.

They don’t know it,
But it’s absolutely true.
I’m still passionately
In love with you.

Your wry half smile,
That’s inviting yet shy,
Is an unmistakable message
To this red-blooded guy.

It tells a whole story,
Writes a whole book,
That “eyes batting, lips
plumping,
Come hither” look.

It’s like a secret weapon.
I’m totally hooked.

Forget all other plans
My afternoon’s booked.

Whenever I see it
There’s only one thing to do,
Because “The Look” means
You’re still in love with me too.

“My plans?” “I don’t know,”
I hear myself say.
“Dear, what do *you* think
We should do today

She's Not You

She walks into the room,
Dripping with gold.
Her Botoxed face
Is unmoving and cold.

Stylishly dressed,
Stylishly slim and fit too.
Here's the problem—
She's not you.

Yes, she's as beautiful
As a magazine model.
But she's that spoiled type
A man has to mollycoddle.

I want a life partner,
Not a show dog pet.
A friend, not a puppy
With a plastic surgeon vet.

I love our memories together,
Quiet times with you.
The way that you hug me.
The little things that you do.

To me you've still got a
Beautiful figure and face.
Yes, we both look older,
But's that's no disgrace.

There's nowhere I'd rather be,
Nothing I'd rather do,
Then live out my days
Loving you.

You're the best thing
In my life.
Partner, friend,
Lover, wife.

As for Ms. Botox,
It's clearly true.
It's not even close,
She's not you.

Sixteen

The summer sun's hot,
We're cruising along,
Car radio's blasting
A country rock song.

Volume's cranked up,
I am too.
I love driving fast
And being with you.

We're both seventy plus
But I feel sixteen.
To me you're still as beautiful
As any prom queen.

I didn't know back then
I'd ever have this life.
Working years behind me,
You as my wife.

I didn't know then
I'd still love the rush
Of fast cars and loud music
Making you blush.

The young think "old"
Means you're through.
They don't know me,
They don't know you.

Careening down life's road
With you by my side
Is still a thrill,
One hell of a ride.

To me, you're still the prettiest
girl
I've ever seen.
Our bodies may be seventy,
But our hearts are still sixteen.

Hug

You wake up yawning and
stretching,
In that old cotton night shirt.
So sensuous, cuddly, curvy,
My eyes almost hurt.

You roll out of bed,
Step onto the rug,
Then come over to me,
Put your arms out for a hug.

You press all of you into me,
I press all of me into you.
The young think seniors don't
feel passion.
If they only knew!

I am blessed
To have this life.
Our family, friends.
You as my wife.

We drink coffee together,
Read the paper and talk.
We might shop for groceries,
Take a cart ride or a walk.

But there's always more hugs
Throughout the day.
How do you tell someone you
love them?
I know a way.

Wrap your arms around them,
Pull them in snug.
Nothing says, "I love you,"
Like a two-become-one hug.

No Chance. No Way

Would I be the man
I am today,
Without you in my life?
No chance. No way.

Fifty years together
Is a long, long time.
We've seen, done it all
Good, bad, silly, sublime.

After a lifetime with you
As lover, partner, friend.
It's even hard to say
Where I start and you end.

When I think of "home,"
It's not a building or place.
It's our years of being together,
Memories time can't erase.

When I think of "joy,"
That's you, too.
My life's biggest thrills
Were all things done with you.

And now as we live out
Our last phase, our senior years,
I'm not focused on decline,
Regrets, tears, or fears.

I think instead of all that's
ahead,
All I still want and can do.
And then I smile, my spirits
soar,
Because I get to do it with you.

If we'd never met, would I be
The same man I am today?
No chance.
No way.

If I Could Start Over

If I could start over
Know what I'd do?
I'd meet you sooner, so I'd have
More years to spend loving you.

If we'd known each other
In first grade,
Elementary school, you and me
Would have laughed and
played.

If we'd known each other
In high school,
We'd have gone to the prom—
It would have been so cool.

When we finally did meet
We were more than twenty.
Life sent us barriers, challenges
Often and plenty.

But no matter the obstacle,
How loud the fuss,
We refused to let anything
Defeat our love, defeat us.

We've been together now
Fifty years.
Shared triumphs, failures,
Tears and fears.

Through it all one thing
Has been constant and true.
I wish I'd had even more years
To spend loving you.

3 Poems for Seniors Who Still Love Life

Around age sixty-eight, I started reflecting on the fact that I was on the precipice of turning seventy years old—a major life milestone. Turning fifty-five was no big deal to me. Sixty and sixty-five were nothing. But I realized that turning seventy was truly a watershed moment. I was now definitely in the final phase of my life.

As seventy came closer and closer, I began putting down my thoughts about my past and my hopes for the future. I found that expressing my thoughts in poetry forced me to focus and distill my ideas. Years later, I still find satisfaction in writing and reading poems.

Hopefully, one day after I'm gone, these poems I'm leaving behind will give our grandkids a picture of who Diane and I were and what our life was about

I hope you enjoy these poems.

The New Old

The old old
Live in their past.
Their best years are behind.
Today's too complex, too fast.

The old old daydream
Instead of pursue.
Hope something will someday
Make their wishes come true.

The old old proceed
Cautiously, with reserve.
They live off past glories.
Stretch things out, preserve.

The old old see the future
As a place made of fears.
Full of diminishment, decline,
Degradation, and tears.

The old old live life
Dimly lit, damp, and cold.
Musty, rusty,
Timid, not bold.

The new old know wrinkles
Are just mile markers of time.
It's their spirit that decides
What decade's their prime.

The new old make their life
An unending quest
To transcend their limits,
Surpass their past best.

The new old's future
Is a place of new heights.
Climbs up new mountains.
Wins in new fights.

Age tracks, not defines
Who the new old are.
They choose their goals.
Age doesn't set their bar.

So, which is your path?
Which old are you?
Is your life up ahead?
Or behind, nearly through?

Instead of life old old,
Backward-looking and bland,
Let your spirit define your
future
Not the hour glass's sand.

E-Bay Make It Go Away!

You say your house
Is a cluttered disgrace.
You've piles of stuff
All over the place.

You've gone four full weeks
Without being able to bathe.
Your tub's full of junk.
To stuff, you're a slave.

Stand up!
Square those shoulders!
Look skyward and say,
"E-Bay, make it go away!"

You execute the sale.
You mail the stuff that day.
It's like a dream.
E-Bay has made it go away!

What if E-Bay could free us
From more than just stuff?
What if it could remove
All in life that is tough?

E-Bay, take my memories
Of failure from me.
From my fears and
Weaknesses, set me free.

E-Bay make me
A better friend.
Wiser, healthier,
Not afraid of life's end.

Alas, no one can help us
Empty those bins.
We're left alone to confront
Our weaknesses, our sins.

So, moan all you want.
Go ahead. Fuss. Complain.
E-Bay will free you from stuff.
But alone we face life's pain.

The Only Way Out Is Through

New Orleans to Houston—
An easy three hundred miles.
All highway driving,
Low stress, all smiles.

But on this fateful,
Ill-omened day,
It turned out
A far different way.

It started easy,
A walk in the park.
Then the sky turned
Menacingly dark.

In an instant we were in it.
It was like diving underwater.
No speed was safe.
Gusts drilled us like an auger.

The storm raged, buffeted.
My wife and I could barely see.
Anywhere but on this road
Was where we wanted to be.

Was that road or shoulder
ahead?
You couldn't tell which.
Cars spun out,
Ended up in the ditch.

Sheets of water slammed us.
There was nothing we could do.
It's the kind of event that
Tests the limits of you.

It was dark as night,
Even though it was morning.
Then our phones started blaring,
“TORNADO WARNING!”

There was nowhere to stop,
Nothing else to do,
Like so many times in life,
Our only way out was
THROUGH.

How many times
Has it all rested on your
shoulders?
You needed to lead, perform,
But you were facing life's
boulders.

Maybe it was an
Impossible school test.
Or a work challenge that
Exceeded your personal best.

You had to face it—
Had to beat it too,
Even though you didn't know
How you were going to.

At those moments,
You know what you must do.
Harden your mind, spirit, body.
Will the challenge to succumb to you.

Thirty-three minutes of this
Terrible white-knuckle drive,
Ended with the sun coming out,
And us glad to be alive.

It wasn't an experience
I'd volunteer to do again.
I wouldn't wish it on an enemy,
And certainly not on a friend.

But life has these surprises.
The best thing you can do
Is face and master them,
Instead of them mastering you.

Every challenge you face,
Makes you a stronger, better you.
Builds your ability to prevail
When your only way out is through.

Class Reunion

Welcome to the Class of X
Time Machine!
Past and present
Shown on the same screen.

The now fat star athlete
Gone to seed.
The still trashy bad girl
With the approval need.

The brainiac engineer
Who made it big.
The class clown who still says,
“Do ya dig?”

There are truly
Interesting people here.
Open, friendly,
Nothing to fear.

.
They are genuinely
Happy to see you.
You are at peace,
Happy to be you.

You remember the good times
More than the bad.
Eat, drink, recount
Funny escapades you had.

Soon, it's heart felt goodbyes,
Promises to stay in touch.
Promises you won't keep,
But it won't matter so much.

Looking back on this day
Is a revelation.
The past is not your destiny,
Nor your salvation.

Hopeless nerd,
Or shining star.
Whoever you were,
You're now who you are.

Good Old Friend

This afternoon I'll see him,
My good old friend.
We'll laugh, reminisce,
Tell our favorite stories again.

No matter how long
Since we last saw each other,
It feels like reuniting
With a long-lost brother.

What is it that makes some
people,
Just feel so right?
While others drive you crazy,
Make you want to take flight?

Perhaps, it's shared history,
For you see,
Our experiences together
Shaped him and shaped me.

Our stories of old adventures,
Triumphs, tears,
Erase the decades,
Roll back the years.

They help us remember,
Who we were and who we are.
They help us celebrate that
We've survived, come this far.

When our visit ends,
We'll exchange a heartfelt
goodbye.
Both secure in the knowledge
that, if today we were to die,

If today was the day our life
Was scheduled to end,
We would have spent our last
hours joyously
With a good old friend.

4 Poems for Seniors Not Ready for the Rocking Chair

Old man. Old woman. What images do those phrases call up for you? Be honest. If you're like most people, when you hear that somebody is old, your mental picture is anything but vitality and fitness. Yet, if you came to my hometown, The Villages Florida, you would see scores of people in their senior years who are still striving to perform physically at a high level.

Rigorous physical training where you measure and track your performance and constantly try to incrementally improve not only makes you healthier. I think it changes your entire outlook on life.

Instead of regarding your senior years as a period of decline, you look ahead to what new personal physical achievement records you can set, what new capabilities and skills you can master. You may be chronologically old, but intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, your life is ahead of you, not behind you.

So, I hope you enjoy the poems in this section. They describe how the physical activities that millions of seniors are undertaking in retirement have provided a means for them to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually and to change their outlook on life.

You Are What You Do

What are you capable of?
How far can you go?
If you're not testing yourself,
How do you know?

Make your life
An unending quest,
To keep elevating
Your personal best.

Becoming that you,
You want to be,
Takes perpetual effort.
Nothing is free.

Setting the goal
Isn't the hard part.
Success only comes
With effort, sweat, heart.

When your mind says, "No."
Switch it to "Go."
When you'd rather stay in,
Force yourself to begin.

If you want to become
The best version of you,
Forget hopes and wishes.
You are what you do.

Grit Reps

It's been a hard squat workout.
You've given it your best.
It's time to end this torture.
Hit the showers. Get some rest.

Coach says, "One more.
And I'm sure you'll love it.
It's a chance to test
Whether you have grit."

"How many reps," you ask.
"Well, that depends on you.
You keep on squatting until
There's no more you can do."

"Ok," you say. "How many
Do you think I can do?"
Coach smiles and says,
"Let's see fifteen out of you."

You cinch down your wrist
wraps,
Lever your lift belt tight.
You glare at the bar.
You're ready for this fight.

You rip off five reps,
Hit ten, then fifteen.
You're feeling focused, angry,
Strong, mean.

"Let's see five more,"
Coach yells out.
"Let's find out here and now
What you're really about."

You grind out twenty.
Thirty, then thirty-five.
You are gasping, growling,
Enraged, thrilled, alive.

Other coaches walk over,
They want to see what you can
do.
It's not about the weight—
It's about what's inside you.

"Have you got forty?"
Let's see it.
This is no time,
To give up, quit."

You are panting, surging,
straining,
Doing all you can do.
It's a death fight between
The bar and you.

You're past the end of your
endurance,
There is nothing more you can
do.
Then someone yells out,
"Have you got fifty in you?"

The bar weighs a ton,
You can't possibly do more.
Then your mind turns your body
to steel,
And you thrust up from the
floor.

You hit fifty, stagger forward,
Lower the bar to the rack.
You were transformed for a
moment.
But now you are back.

There are fist bumps, smiles.
Coach gives you a high five.
You are exhausted, exhilarated.
On these moments you thrive.

It isn't just about strength
Or about being tough.
It's a contest to see
If inside, you have enough.

Can you will yourself to be
more
Then you ever dreamed you
could be?
Can you achieve hard-fought
goals?
Erase your boundaries?

Mentor, not foe.
The bar's a partner who
Helps you become
The best version of you.

Team Practice

Your turn up.
The deadlift bar awaits,
Shiny chrome steel,
Massive black plates.

You walk to your spot,
You know what you must do.
It's a contest between the bar
And what's inside of you.

But they are with you,
You're not fighting alone,
You are part of a team,
You are one of their own.

You get into your stance,
The yelling begins,
"You can do this!"
"Lock it in! Lock it in!"

Your body fuses with the bar,
Your feet stick the floor like
glue,

You hear a loud growling
sound—
That sound is coming from you.

The bar starts to lift.
Your team starts to shout.
Your body thrusts up.
Your shoulders lock out.

Yes, you could do this
All on your own.
But it's not the same,
When it's your fight alone.

When you are part of a team,
You feel there's nothing you
can't do.
You're more focused, more
intense.
The team makes you your best
You.

Hard Things

Hard things aren't
The things that break you.
Hard things are the things
That make you.

Life's not what you say,
It's what you do.
Set a low bar,
Become a low bar you.

Reach high and even
If you don't take home gold,
You build a You,
That's strong and bold.

Face down hard things
And soon life has few
Things that can stop,
Or even scare you.

Run to life's challenges
Not away,
And you become the one,
Who saves the day.

You become the one
On which people can rely.
The heroine, the hero,
The clutch play kind of guy.

So next time you're exhausted,
And wanting to quit,
Remember your actions
Are how your story will be writ.

Hard things aren't your
problem.
They're your secret weapon to
Become a stronger, better,
More resilient You.

Heavy Bag Workout

“Siri, start timer.
Start my next round.”
The bell rings, you explode
Thrilled, unleashed at the sound.

Jab, jab, hook.
Jab, jab, hook.
Each round is a story
You write like a book.

Circle, attack.
Circle attack.
Until the round is over
There’s no going back.

Left jab, double jab,
Left hook, left cross.
You punch with all you have,
Show the bag who is boss.

Torquing your body,
Punching with all your weight.
The bag is a dance partner
You really love to hate.

You punish the bag
With your best combo.
You’re mortal foes
Dancing a rage-filled mambo.

It’s rhythm, cadence,
Repetition, tempo.
You and the bag become one
Perfectly linked, simpatico.

Your shoulders scream with
pain,
Your whole body starts to tire.
But you keep fighting on
With determination, inner fire.

For the actual purpose
Of this bout
Is a test of what’s inside
Not what’s out.

It’s not you against the bag.
It’s really you against you.
How far can you push yourself?
How much more can you do?

Instead of a hated foe,
The bag’s a partner who
Helps you forge
A better, stronger you.

You know what you were—
How much more can you be?
When Siri starts her timer,
It’s your chance to see.

The finish timer rings,
Exhausted you end the round.
But you treasure your time with
the bag
And the new inner strength
you’ve found.

5 Poems for Seniors Who Still Love Family

Family. The word itself brings forth a rush of memories for most people. Some sweet. Some not. By the time you reach your senior years, family is a multidimensional term.

There's your parents' family, the one you were a part of growing up. If you are lucky, there is your own family, the one that includes you, your spouse, your children, grandchildren, and even your pets.

There's also that extended network of mentors, friends, distant relations, neighbors, and other people who have touched your life in ways that are enduring and make them important in your life.

In your senior years, you realize that the time you have to enjoy family, to get your family relationships "right," is not unlimited. That realization makes family even more important. I hope you enjoy these poems that explore the experience of family.

What Matters

In my latter years,
I've started looking back.
One big mystery is
How do you keep track?

There are people out there
Who think themselves blessed,
When they can't get their arms
Around the expanse of their
mess.

I've had seven Harley's
And six cats.
I've got a dresser full of T-
shirts
And baseball hats.

Would my life have more
meaning,
If I owned a warehouse store?
Would I be a better person,
If I simply owned more?

If you measure your life
By your pile of stuff,
You'll forever be behind.
You can't hoard enough.

No amount of stuff is worth
dying
Miserable, alone.
At the end it's who loves you,
Not what you own.

When I think about
What's important in my life,
It's daughter, grandkids,
friends,
My wonderful wife.

So, what they say must be true.
It is for me.
The best things in my life
Actually are free.

Out of Control

I'm totally frustrated,
Don't know what to do.
I keep preaching and preaching,
But can't seem to get through.

I urge them to be safe,
Avoid unnecessary risks and
dangers.
Instead, they're out riding fast
electric bikes,
Dancing in town squares with
strangers.

I suggest modest little walks,
Taking care not to fall.
Instead, they spend their time
on
Water aerobics and pickleball.

And the way they act in public.
It's enough to make you blush!
They hold hands, even kiss.
Like teenagers with a crush.

They don't seem to understand
This is when they should be
slowing down.
Instead, their schedule is packed
full.
They are always running
around.

Sometimes, I wonder
Why I even bother.
I just can't seem to talk sense
To my mother and father!

Every Family Has One

Every family has one,
They're like a secret that you
keep.
Everyone loves everyone,
Except the black sheep.

Anger, yelling,
Accusation,
In the family body,
They are the inflammation.

Holidays ruined.
Family dinners trashed.
Hopes for reconciliation,
Repeatedly dashed.

No matter what you do,
Try as you might,
In their eyes you never
Do anything right.

They feel unloved,
Treated unfair.
It's all your fault.
It's because you don't care.

You try everything
To make things right.
Nothing works.
They continue to fight.

Finally, you come
To a painful conclusion,
You can't overcome
Their mental illness, delusion.

You can't pray enough
To powers above,
To make them feel whole.
To make them feel loved.

It's a sobering,
Horrible self-discovery.
They, not you, are in charge
Of their recovery.

Outsiders ask
With smug derision
How you let your family
End up in this condition.

But it isn't neglect.
It isn't volition.
You have no control.
It's not your decision.

You may hate it,
Think it's inane.
But legally they've
The right to remain insane.

You can't make them see
counselors
Or take pills.
You can't force them
To address their mental ills.

You are impotent, powerless,
Without authority.
Their disease is in charge.
Its vote is the majority.

So, when you see a family
struggle
With a spouse, sibling, or child,
Who is totally dysfunctional,
Disruptive and wild,

Don't condescend
Or opine on what they should
do.
Because, but for the grace of
God,
Instead of them, it could be
you.

Fear Not the Super Soaker

Finally, we're in Seattle
On a warm, sunny day.
There's only one game
My grandson wants to play.

"Squirt guns, Papa,"
I hear him say.
Even though this is fight to the
death stuff,
I jump into the fray.

We dig out last summer's
Tiny squirt guns.
We usually each get three,
But he says he only wants one.

I choose a yellow,
A green, and a blue.
Then I see the plan,
What he intends to do.

Out he comes with a huge
Super Soaker.
My grandson is watching me.
So, I can't be a choker.

But his one
Is like tons,
To my ounce-sized
Squirt guns.

Ready for the challenge,
We begin the chase.
Round the house,
In and out of the bushes we
race.

We're laughing and firing
At a frantic pace.
Squirting the house and each
other
All over the place.

My grandson has range,
firepower,
And young legs on his side.
But this Papa's not going down
without a fight.
I have my pride.

Time for old man cunning and
wisdom.
Time to reverse the tide.
I grab two guns and set out
To avenge my soaking
backside.

I run right at him,
Squirting straight into his face.
His composure is disrupted.
He sprays all over the place.

Yes, I'm getting soaked,
But it's worth every minute.
We're laughing like crazy
And we are both still in it.

Soon squirt guns empty,
We fall squealing to the
ground.
We're drenched, exhausted,
Too tired for another round.

So, if you think a Super Soaker
can beat Papa,
Forget it! Don't bother!
A Super Soaker's no match
For a Super Grandfather!

My Destiny

In a life that's rich
And full of fun,
One of my greatest joys
Is my seven-year-old grandson.

It's a bond that's more
Then just family,
I love and respect him.
He loves and respects me.

He's smart, funny,
Good-hearted too.
Give him LEGOs, puzzles, or
science kits
And there's nothing he can't
do.

Together we wrestle, swim,
Race Hot Wheel cars.
Play catch, watch cartoons,
Talk about space and the stars.

I warn him of the world's
dangers,
Prepare him to fight,
To protect himself from
strangers
And worldly threats in the
night.

I still love his mom, my little
girl.
She and my wife are the heart of
my world.
Now a parent herself, she was
once his age too.
My grandson reignites my
"Dad" feelings anew.

My era is fading, nearly gone.
His life, his time, have just
begun.
Inside him is a tiny DNA part of
me.
He is my future, my destiny.

6 Poems for Seniors Who Love Cruising the Caribbean

Diane and I are blessed to live out our retirement years in Florida, the cruise capital of the world. We had never traveled by cruise ship until we retired to Florida. We love the experience of cruising.

The poems in this section were written in 2019 on a pre-COVID cruise Diane and I took to the Panama Canal. This was our longest cruise ever at the time and a wonderful trip. These poems describe what we saw and experienced in the countries we visited.

They also reflect our great sense of gratitude that we are Americans. Diane and I both come from modest blue collar, small-town, middle-class backgrounds. Growing up, it would have been very difficult for anyone to envision the two of us rolling through the Panama countryside in a glass-domed luxury train, or watching the sun set on the ocean from the private balcony of our cruise ship cabin.

America is still truly the land of opportunity. Being an American means your past and your group identity are not your destiny. It is a place where a factory worker's son and a minister's daughter, through hard work and determination, can boot strap their way up and experience a wonderful trip like this even though they started their life together in very humble circumstances.

I hope you enjoy these poems.

Caribbean

It comes tomorrow.
An Arctic blast.
Get out of town.
Do it fast.

Go to a place where
The weather's warm.
Where drinks are cold.
Where pretty girls swarm.

There's only one place
To which you are fleeing—
Get on down
To the Caribbean.

Lounge by the pool
On a big white cruise ship,
Watch people. Sunbathe.
Jump in. Take a dip.

Immerse yourself
In warm sunshine,
Drink rum and coke.
Live island time.

Catch the beat
Of drums of steel,
See exotic sights
Unfamiliar. Unreal.

Eat and drink,
Laugh, dance, and such.
Remind your partner
You love them so much.

When the time comes
For your cruise to end,
You're already dreaming
About doing it again.

'Cause the islands are more
Then just not being cold,
They make you feel young,
Happy, and bold.

Maybe what they say
About the island sun's true.
It's a fire in the sky
That reignites the fire in
you.

Jamaica Me Crazy

It's an ethnic slur
That says Jamaicans are lazy
With work ethics that
Are at best, spotty, hazy.

But what would you say,
What would you do
If Jamaicans knew more
About quality of life than you?

Western world workers
Are reachable 24x7.
Sounds to me more like slavery
Then it does like heaven.

That T-Shirt shop lady
Doesn't own a fancy car.
But she's home at six each
night.
To her family, she's a star.

Three generations of her family
Sit down each night for dinner.
Her family respects her,
Considers her a winner.

On Sunday they all
Walk together to church.
Give thanks for the salvation
You still long for and search.

You have an iPhone
And a 401k.
But when you dine with your
kids,
No one has anything to say.

People spend a few minutes
Trying to make nice.
But quickly everyone dives
Separately into their device.

They text talk to people
Who aren't even there.
They ignore those in front of
them,
Despite saying they care.

Things are how
You measure wealth.
She treasures her family,
Her God, and good health.

So, reconsider what you value.
Reassess what you do.
That "lazy" T-shirt woman
Might just be richer than you.

Cartagena, The Walled City

The Spanish were once the
Superpower of the world.
Over distant lands
Their banner they'd unfurl.

In Colombia, they built
A grand fort and walled city.
At Cartagena,
A city so historic, so pretty.

Beautiful homes draped
In bougainvillea.
Beautiful women who smile
When they see you.

High cheek bones
Olive hued faces.
Jet black eyes, hair
Centuries of mixing races.

Convents now
Repurposed for other things.
But the faithful still come
When cathedral bells ring.

A mix of the ancient,
The merely old, and the new.
Statues, stories, art.
Yet, Coca Cola, KFC, too.

The Spanish feared outside
forces.
Invaders with cannons, guns,
and horses.
Nowadays the invaders arrive
by tourist bus.
Invasive street vendors the only
source of fuss.

But the people are fiercely
proud.
Each generation rebuilds the
city anew.
They create jobs, a vibrant
culture.
Places to go. Things to do.

Cartagena, city of history.
Proud of its past glory.
Narrow streets. Caribbean
beats.
Still writing its future story.

Costa Rica Socialist Utopia

We gather each night
And talk over ship dinners,
About which excursions were a
 bust,
And which were the winners.

Those on the rain forest tour
Said plants and waterfalls
 aside,
They were mainly impressed
By the politics of their guide.

They positively gushed
About her story
Of unabashed socialist
Virtue and glory.

How Costa Rica was leaving its
Oil, gas, and gold in the
 ground.
Pursuing green energy.
Making sure wealth was spread
 around.

They seemed embarrassed
About having to say
They came from our
Awful, capitalist USA.

After listening patiently
For a while,
I added our story
To the evidence pile.

We toured the city of Limon
Without a guide.
We walked the streets,
In lieu of a tour bus ride.

The average American wouldn't
Trade for this socialist dream.
We saw mostly squalor and
 poverty,
Some mild, some extreme.

The stores and streets were
 dingy.
The park was run down.
It was clear that poverty and
 deprivation
Were what the government was
 spreading around.

Our dinner mates admitted
 seeing poverty,
But only from the window of
 their bus,
As their guide loudly
 propagandized,
How much better she was than
 us.

In the end, though
Everyone at our table
Acknowledged her pitch
Was just a socialist fable.

No one said they'd trade
What Americans had
For a life in Costa Rica so
Impoverished and sad.

Back home there are factions
Starting to flirt
With notions of socialism,
Thinking it couldn't hurt

To spread the wealth
And slow US capitalism down.
Make sure everyone has
Enough to go 'round.

But when you travel
You see firsthand what
socialism is about.
Not its rhetoric and principles,
But what average people live
without.

Socialist elites preach
Spreading wealth to all.
Yet their wealth rises
While everyone else's falls.

Everyone else lives
In a run-down neighborhood.
While the myth of social justice
Makes the elites feel good.

Here's my offer
Mr. US socialist candidate.
Move to Costa Rica
Before it's too late.

Live green and self-righteous,
Poor and dead ended too.
When you actually see socialism
at work,
It leaves a scar on you.

You don't believe in the USA
Or anything we do.
Well, we've seen your socialist
Utopia.
We don't believe in you.

My Quiet Life

This cruise has been great—
New people, new places.
A kaleidoscope of sights,
Sound, and faces.

This trip was fun—
It had its glamor.
But I wouldn't trade life back
home
For all this bustle and
clamor.

While an occasional adventure
Has much to give.
I have the life
I want to live.

Just me, our cat,
And Diane, my wife.
We love our cozy, comfy,
Quiet life.

Days in the gym,
Nights watching TV.
Meals we cook ourselves.
Friends and neighbors to see.

I know who I am and
Where I want to be.
This trip was fun, but
My quiet life's for me.

6 Concluding Observations

My father was my hero growing up and remains so to this very day. Dad was not wealthy or famous, but he was rich in spirit.

Dad valued his past and all that had brought him to where he was. Yet, he lived for what was today and what could be tomorrow. He never stopped dreaming. He never stopped striving. He never stopped trying to become the best he could be at everything he was involved with.

The traits my dad exemplified as an individual are emblematic of the spirit of twenty-first century seniors in America overall. I see in my life peers a refusal to live in or for the past.

I see my generation of seniors growing, giving, sharing, and still trying to figure life out even though the calendar says they are in the last act of their time on life's stage. They live each day as though the greatest passions, achievements, and opportunities of their lives may still lie ahead of them.

It is this indomitable spirit, this drive to keep evolving and achieving, that makes this generation of seniors' sunset years a vibrant, exciting, dynamic time of life. Never stop striving, never stop dreaming, never stop achieving. That is the true secret of life. That is the message of these poems.

I opened this collection of writings with an excerpt from my poem, "Sunset Years." I am going to close with that same poem. These words are the essence of all that is best in my generation's attitude toward living out your senior years. I hope they speak to you the same way they speak to my wife, Diane, and me. Thanks for reading this collection and sharing our life.

Sunset Years

*Your sunset years are
No time to sit in a chair,
Out of shape, face fixed
In a sad, vacant stare.*

*There's still plenty of time to
Fight the good fight,
Before you go quietly
Into the night.*

*Still time for romance
To stir passion in you,
Still time to experience
Love, deep and true.*

*There's still time to draw
On your inner strength fountains.
Still time to climb those last few
Elusive goal mountains.*

*Still time to gain more knowledge,
Even physical strength too.
Your last chance to be
That final best you.*

*So will you go out
Weak and sorry?
Or will your sunset years
Be a blaze of glory?*

*For you still decide
Where your future lies.
Be technicolor clouds exploding
Against crimson sunset skies.*