

Over-50: Pioneers in the New Wild Wild West

By Jane Genova

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Dedicated to cognitive therapist Amy Karnilowicz, West Hartford, Connecticut. She taught me how to start over again.

Other books by Jane Genova

“The Critical 14 Years of Your Professional Life”

“Geezer Guts: Earning a Buck at Any Age”

“The Fat Guy from Greenwich”

Table of Contents

Introduction

1 How “Old” Looks, Talks, and Walks

2 Getting It that Aging Means Everything Is Changing

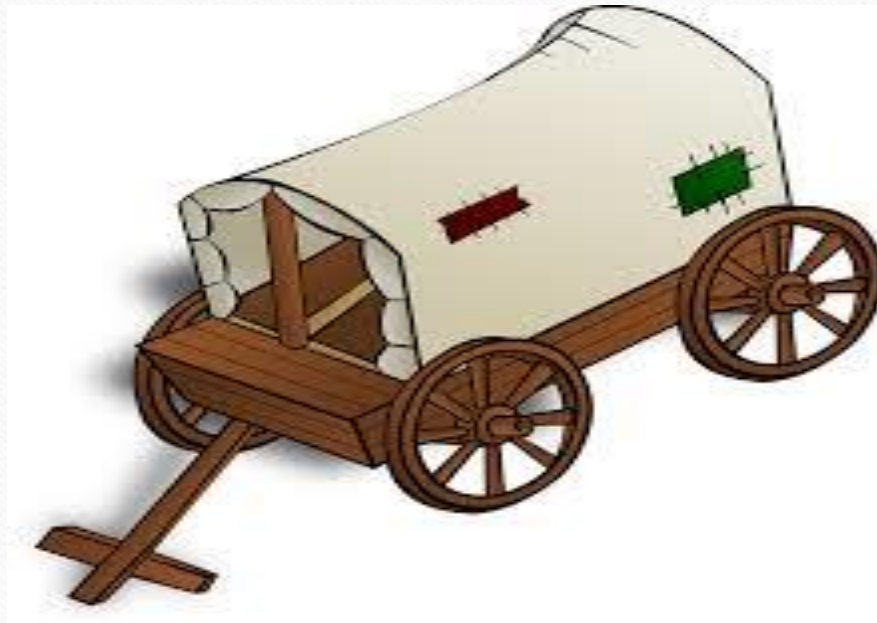
3 Loving Our Sins, Screwups, and Shortcomings

4 Living Our Lives the Way Goldilocks Did

5 Pushing Back

*Conclusion * About Author * About Coaching * Testimonials*

Introduction



There are 121 million of us over-50.

That 121 million only includes the 76 million Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1965) and 45 million Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1981).

In addition, there are millions of members of the Silent Generation. Many of the Silent Generation are still employed or operating their own businesses. Others are enjoying the bliss what is traditionally known as “retirement.”

Plus, there is a growing group of the under-50 who have been age-shamed. Most of them are in tech or glamour professions such as media. Because of the shock of being age-shamed, they come to me The Coach. They blurt out, “Out there, ‘they’ think I am ‘old.’”

Welcome to the new aging. It’s a scary and fun wild wild west.

No other generation has lived so long. We’re pioneers. And we find ourselves with no templates for how to live our lives, manage our money, and push back on the meanies who simply don’t like the idea that we are still here.

And, mostly we are on our own, just like members of those wagon trains heading west when America was just getting started.

Sure, there is all that advice out there. But, most of those dishing it aren’t 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, or 100+. They aren’t us.

Meanwhile, there are those meanies. They can suck the soul from us with their cutting remarks and discriminatory behavior.

So, clients I coach asked for this book. They wanted a concrete something for direction on how to get to where they want to go and protect themselves along the way. Regarding the latter, the trail is full of predators.

Read a paragraph at a time. Mediate on it. Form of group to discuss what you are thinking. And if you hit an emotional, spiritual, or logistical wall, I'm always here – The Coach.

Chapter 1 – How “Old” Looks, Talks, and Walks

age.

Aging is a natural process. Old is a state of being we inflict on ourselves.

Aging kicks off at the moment of conception. That is, when the egg is fertilized by a sperm.

The problem is not aging per se. That happens every moment of our lives.

It's that no phase of aging is easy. That's exactly why there are so many people stuck in arrested development.

On the former AMC television series "Mad Men," creative genius Don Draper creates a marketing campaign for client Kodak. It is wrapped around the meme of nostalgia. Newbie teenagers look back to those simple days of childhood. Meanwhile, they struggle to accept their changed bodies, emerging sexual impulses, and social pressures.

No surprise, too many of them never make it out of childhood.

Our developmental task is to make it out of middle age to what's next. Meanwhile, the burden is on us not to look, walk, and talk old. Aging happens. Being old never needs to.

What screams old? Here are the common “tells” or giveaways that we are, in the eyes of the world, old.

- Advice-giving. That always makes human beings pests. But it’s unforgivable over-50. People in distress might say they want advice. Usually all they want is for us to listen. It was human relations genius Dale Carnegie who hammered that learning to listen is the platform for both social and professional success. On the internet, we can download free excerpts from his book “How to Win Friends and Influence People.”
- References to just about anything more than five minutes ago. When everyone is laughing about the pickle the three housewives are in on the television network show “Good Girls,” we don’t bring up the episode on “Mary Tyler Moore” when Chuckles the Clown died. Remember how bored we became when grandma wouldn’t stop talking about the radio programs she had followed, before television?
- Accomplishments from the past, unless they relate to solving a problem in the present. A leader in the public relations industry had once headed a major firm. After he was forced out of that position, he launched his own communications boutique. It would have done better had he not kept touting – in all mediums – how he had increased revenues and profits 15 years ago. It came across as worse than boasting. Instead he was labeled as one of those lost professionals who never bounced back after a setback.

- Discomfort with appearance. No, don't suck in our stomachs. Either we should overhaul how we look or live with it. Our gain of seven pounds probably bothers us a lot more than it does anyone else. Any sort of self-consciousness makes us stand out for the wrong reasons. We should have gotten over that before we graduated high school.
- Narcissism. That extreme preoccupation with the self is something only babies and celebrities can pull off. That's the way it goes. The more we focus on others the more welcome we will be in diverse circles. No, don't post daily multiple photos of the grandchildren on Facebook. On holidays, two photos will be plenty. Otherwise, prepare to be unfriended.
- Out-of-date language. Listen to how those under-50 talk. No, they don't use words like "nimble." And, yes, it's okay to sprinkle in a few "likes, but we can't overdo it. We also shouldn't be running around classifying everything as "cool."
- Voicing regrets. That's a downer at any age. The current approach is to classify whatever was negative as a priceless learning lesson. Actually, that's usually reality. Had Steve Jobs not been fired and driven from the corporation he started he probably wouldn't have been able to mature into an effective leader.
- Complaining. In many communities there is a generational war. Millennials and iGeners blame us for everything from holding onto the good jobs to using up Social Security. From their point of view, we have nothing to whine about. So, complaining isn't an option.

Chapter 2 – Getting It that Aging Means Everything Is Changing



Whether we turn 3, 13, 53, or 83, more and more of the life we had the previous year will disappear. So much is changing. The bad news is that many aspects of our life will keep changing. That's just the way it goes.

But the good news is that we can make it our mission to emerge from each shift emotionally stronger, more content, and wildly confident .

So, how do we start on that mission?

Spoiler: The easiest and most effective way is observing others who are encountering change, analyze their attitude and behaviors, determine what's propelling them forward and what's keeping them stuck. Apply lessons learned to our own situation.

Before the HBO television series "The Sopranos" ended in 2007, Edie Falco, who played the mobster's wife Carmela, wondered if she could:

Find another job that good

Portray other kinds of characters

Have fans accept her in roles other than Carmela Soprano.

Her first Next was the role of an addicted healthcare employee "Nurse Jackie." That earned several Emmy nominations. Recently, Falco portrayed lawyer Leslie Abramson who had defended the Menendez brothers. That show was "Law & Order True Crime."

What did Falco do right? Here's how I connected the dots, at least as I applied them to my own life:

From the get-go, she was aware that she would have to change and that change would be challenging. She might have had a jump on that because she is a recovered alcoholic. To stop drinking and stay stopped, those in recovery have to change everything.

She took a risk, actually a big one. The addicted nurse required a big stretch from a mob wife.

She was open to keep changing. The parts she went after were diverse.

Falco's transitions gave many of us assurance that we too could get from Point A to Points B, C, and D.

There are other ways to figure out how to change. With so much disruption generated by technology, there is no shortage of books on how to make our way to The Next. They include:

"Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself: How to Lose Your Mind and Create a New One" by Dr. Joe Dispenza

"How to Survive Change ... You Didn't Ask For: Bounce Back, Find Calm in Chaos, and Reinvent Yourself"
by M.J. Ryan

"Who Moved My Cheese?" by Spencer Johnson and Kenneth Blanchard

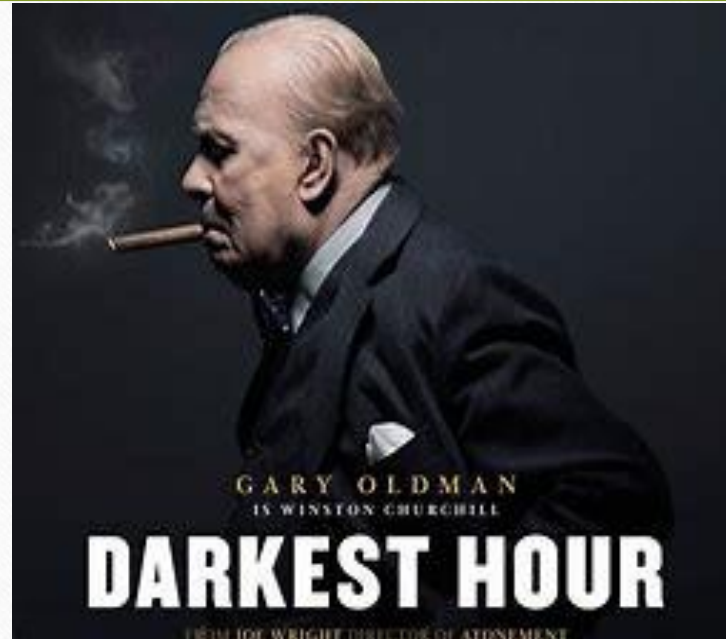
"Necessary Endings" by Henry Cloud

In addition, there are no-cost self-help groups available to those of us who feel overwhelmed. They come in all formats. Those range from 12-step spin-offs of Alcoholics Anonymous such as Emotions Anonymous to Shambhala Buddhists engaging in mindfulness.

For those whose medical insurance has a mental-health benefit, cognitive therapy is an efficient intervention. The assumption of that approach is that we are what we think. Transform thought processes and we undergo a psychic paradigm shift.

In 2003, when I had lost my business, nest egg, and mind I sought out cognitive therapist Amy Karnilowicz, based in West Hartford, Connecticut. Among the shifts in thinking was giving myself permission to, as I came to put it, “prune the tree of life.” Every month I made it my business to remove the people, places, and things which were becoming toxic.

Chapter 3 – Loving Our Sins, Screwups, and Shortcomings



The film “Darkest Hour” portrays a very flawed human being – Winston Churchill. When he was at a low point guiding England during Hitler’s reign of terror, his wife Clementine reminds him of this: His imperfections make him who he is. She adds that all his earlier screwups are what have given him strength and wisdom.

The same ethos underlies 12-step recovery program Alcoholics Anonymous. Weakness is the power grid which lights the way to living a life without alcohol. In the iconic speaker meetings, those who have turned their lives around bear witness to their earlier sins and shortcomings.

The past is a terrible thing to waste. Let’s call him Jonathan. In a plea deal he lost his license to practice law and accepted 18 months in jail and three months in a halfway house. He wanted coaching for how to put together a new career path at age 68. His edge in moving forward was that he understood and *treasured* his past.

“I hated myself.”

That’s how he summed up the undertow which dragged him into the riptides of criminal activity. He financed a lifestyle he could not afford for his wife and stepsons.

“Now I love myself.”

Because he could make that leap from self-hate to self-love he could invest every moment after his incarceration into creating the life he wanted. He went on to become a script writer for documentaries.

So, how do we embrace our past with the respect it deserves?

Ask ourselves, What happened to us? On “60 Minutes,” Oprah Winfrey explained that question should replace, “What did we do?” in assessing our lives. What we did usually represents the effects of what happened to us. Reframing the past in that way has become a breakthrough approach to forgiving ourselves.

Laugh at ourselves. With gentleness. Our ordeals mirror those of the characters in that dark AMC series “Breaking Bad.” All human beings make fools of ourselves when chasing after what we want, what we think we want, or what others tell us to want.

Stop confessing our sins. Conventional wisdom is that confession is good for the soul. That’s nonsense. In its 12 steps of recovery, the Alcoholics Anonymous program emphasizes prudence in choosing the one human being with whom we will discuss our shortcomings. In addition, intimacy is so valued because the context provides safe space to reveal our negatives. When we too freely bare our souls to the world, we open the door to being attacked by the meanies.

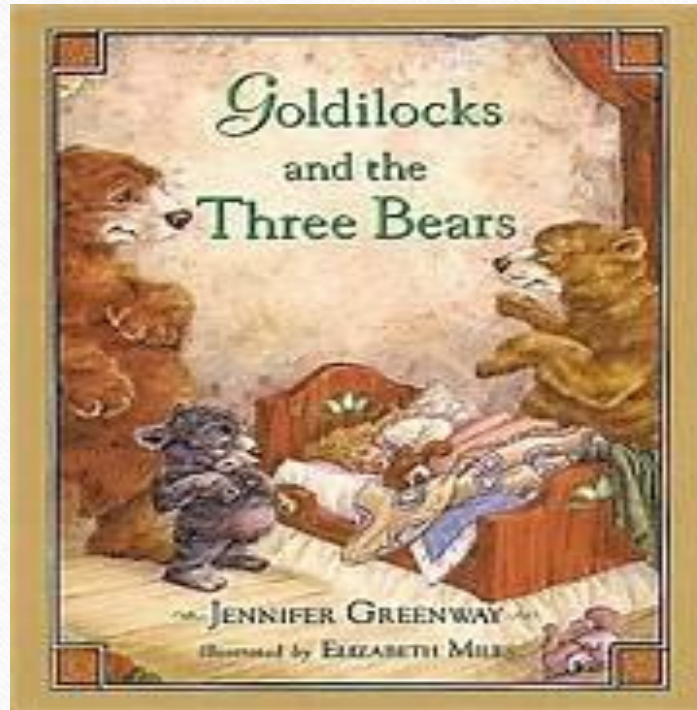
Purge whatever triggers shame about the past. In her book Judith Voirst calls all that “necessary losses.” Not long ago, a former colleague in our doctoral studies at the University of Michigan alluded to my drinking. I had embraced recovery in 1981. I replied that had I not been a drunk I couldn’t have made it through the transition from graduate school to real life. Then, I blocked her on gmail and the smartphone. On Facebook, I unfriended her.

Set big goals post-setbacks. There seems to be a correlation between big screwups and big success. In Arkansas, Bill Clinton lost the re-election campaign for governor. He went on to become a two-term U.S. president.

And, recognize that we might not have survived had we not done all those dysfunctional things when we had no insight about ourselves. And didn’t understand how the world really worked.

It’s useful to also add that America loves screwups. They are called “anti-heroes.” After all, the country was founded by a bunch of misfits who could make it in the old country. They migrated to the new land and created their own rules. The result was the most powerful economy in the world.

Chapter 4 – Living Our Lives the Way Goldilocks Did



It isn't only those over-50 who assume that we have to get things right the first time. In 2015, film-maker John Waters delivered the commencement address at the Rhode Island School of Design. In a sense he had to give permission even to those creatives to go out there, try things, and, yes, risk looking less-than – or even like a trouble-maker. Waters later put that in book form “Make Trouble.”

I have come to call that willingness to experiment – and come across as a jerk or even trouble – The Goldilocks Attitude. Recall that Goldilocks dared not settle. She found her first choice of a bed was too hard. The next too soft. Only the third was just right. The same for her choice of cuisine.

Fortunately for the human race, The Goldilocks Attitude is already dominant in certain parts of this nation and in certain kinds of groups. I first bumped into it when I relocated to southwestern Arizona from the New York Metro area. That would lower my fixed expenses and get me out of the careerist ethos of Manhattan. I was determined to adjust and live there happily ever after in my new location.

Now and then my neighbors and those I met while walking the dog would reassure me that if I couldn't handle the heat (122 degrees some afternoons) or the laid-back values I could write it all off as an adventure. And try someplace else. They then provided a laundry list of others who have given it a month or a year or even two years and high-tailed it out.

Mmmmm. All that sounded reckless to buttoned-down me. After all, I had professionally come of age in the old-line corporation. That was the era of absolutes. Also, the quality circles back then instituted a mindset of Doing It Right the First Time.

I was 100 percent certain I would make the relocation a success. Then, after six months I was thinking the unthinkable: Had I made a big mistake? In six more months I did renew the lease. I told myself that I would adjust. In 12 more months I again renewed the lease. In three more months I broke the lease. Research on the internet turned up that eastern Ohio was even more affordable. And off I went.

It's our responsibility to get over the assumption that the first choice will be the right one.

A 59 year old colleague had lost a big job on Wall Street. It took him seven months (including running out of severance) to land a comparable one. He was settling in. Then a boss from two jobs ago had started a new company. He needed a seasoned communications assistant. He offered terms and conditions to my colleague superior to those he was receiving. He made the change. The suffering of so little work during The Great Recession had taught him to question everything he had believed. At the top of this was the almost sacred code of sticking with The Plan. Now he knew: Humans plan, the gods laugh.

Around the world, not only in the U.S., are those who gleefully retire. Some go on continuing to relish not working. Others get bored. They notice that without their former professional identity folks are treating them as invisible. Money is not going as far as they assumed. They make the decision to return to working.

The challenge there is not so much to find a way of earning income. More companies, ranging from Home Depot to Marc's, are hiring the aging. More of us are starting businesses or purchasing franchises. And, to make ends meet we are figuring out what the neighbors need done. That could be to pay to have their dog walked. The trick is to get in the habit of not apologizing for a shift in planning.

Chapter 5 – Pushing Back



Are we humans wired for justice? Seems that way.

From the get-go, we get eaten up by the need to right the wrongs done us. Our emotional state becomes a wild wild west.

The trick is to not to make the situation worse . Murders and suicides happen all the time. So do lawsuits. We could get fired or lose an important client. Relationships get blown into little bits.

For those of over-50, the wrongs can be subtle. They can take the form of the kind of disrespect those who are hostile or just clueless show toward us. At a business lunch, a colleague looks our way and observes, “You don’t look your age.” In our age-biased capitalist society, any mention of age is never a positive. If we are verbally adept we smile, engage intense eye contact, and say, “That wasn’t necessary.” We allow that awkward moment to be absorbed by the group.

If we are in shock and do not respond on the spot there are an infinite number of ways to restore the balance of justice. At the top of the list is to forever throw shade without crossing the line into defamation. An example? You are asked your professional opinion of that colleague. You smirk. Shrug. End of that story. Sound unethical since that colleague is skilled at what he does? It probably is. But we are not automatically bound to a code of moral superiority. Far more important is maintaining our sense of self and confidence. Pushing back does that. Is it a must? For some of us, yes.

On the other hand, the injustice could be serious. It impacts our ability to earn a living. The interviewer for a job, it's all so obvious, is just going through the motions. As soon as we walked in the room, her face twitched. She hadn't expected someone even over-40.

No surprise, we don't get the job offer.

How could justice play out?

Well, like the 32 plaintiffs in "Rabin v. PwC," we could file a lawsuit alleging age bias in how a company hires. That is assuming a lawyer will take the case on contingency or we can afford to pursue legal action. In no time, the bill could reach five figures. In addition, as Robert Burson reported in Bloomberg March 16, 2018, winning age bias lawsuits is difficult.

So, maybe that isn't the most efficient path to justice.

A smarter move is to become more self-protective. Age bias isn't going to vanish in our lifetime. So, we prevent unnecessary pain and wasting our hope and time by researching where the odds are better that we can land work.

Meanwhile, we have to accept the brutal reality that we may never return to the earning level of several years ago. The opportunities might not be offered to us. Or we simply don't have the energy to put in those 80 hour weeks.

In terms of where we search, no, we don't apply at tech giant Google. Not unless we have the unique skill that tech company needs right then. We find out what companies actually welcome the aging.

We also investigate which companies have sight-unseen hiring practices. More and more conduct the entire process, including the interview, online via text. There is no video. Yes, we receive the job offer. Then we report for duty.

Will our age hold us back from getting ahead in that organization? That's another matter. And one we can handle later. We take making it in the wild wild west one hour at a time. We had to focus on the present. Sometimes for some earning situations we don't even have to ever show up in-person. Training is done online. Then we do the call-center tasks or selling time-shares from our home.

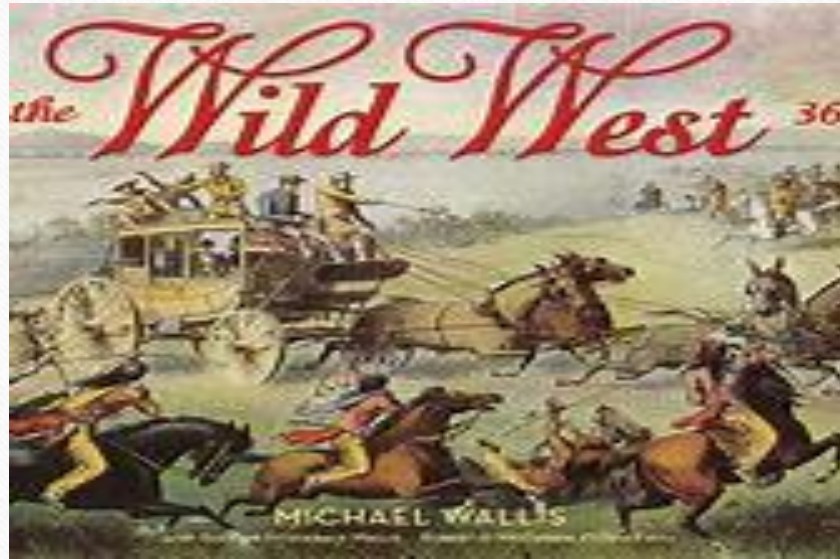
Some locations around the U.S. are less aged biased than others. Arizona is among them. The New York Metro area isn't.

Also, we can be retrained to do tasks that can be performed totally remotely. Maintaining a company's social media accounts is one of them. Creating English content for a tour company in China is another. Not that justice is always or even often total. Over-50, if we are employees our opportunities may contract. No matter what. That's exactly why the aging are embracing entrepreneurship. According to research by insurance company Easy Life Cover, one out of every three new businesses is started by those over-50.

And, what about justice in personal relationships? We have a perfect right to go to the full extent of the law in a divorce. Harassment can be reported to the police, once we have informed the person not to contact us again. And, yes, we can abruptly shut down all forms of communications with those who betrayed us. No explanation needed. The old rules of nice don't apply in the wild wild west.

No matter what happens to us, the burden is on us not to make it worse. And, it can get a lot worse quickly. So, we don't spot the colleague who treated us with disrespect going into a bar, follow, and loudly tell him off. Expect to be arrested.

Conclusion



Being over-50 is filled with unknowns. And if we want to participate in the fun parts it is also filled with the need to change and keep changing.

Few of us expected to have the role of pioneer. But here it is. The awesome part is that we are establishing new ways to survive and thrive.

Because we are getting the hang of pushing back we are also disrupting how the aging are perceived and treated.

For some of us that has been the first time we have dared rock the boat. If that becomes a habit, there is no ceiling on what we can put together for our lives.

About the Author Jane Genova



My name is Jane Genova.

How I began coaching those over-50 is because you asked me to help you. You had a gut feeling that once you were up from under the specific challenge you were facing you could soar.

You had found out about me and my own struggles with aging in lots of different ways. Some of you had read my [blog](#), [book](#), and columns on AOL about how I had to start my career over again in my 50s. I was in six-figure debt. You might have attended my lectures, such as at the New York state Bar Association, on how to neutralize aging in cover letters and resumes.

Also, I had co-authored the guide “The Critical 14 Years of Your Professional Life.” It went from hardback to paperback to e-book. Currently you could be following my aging-centric blogs. [Here](#) and [here](#) they are. Eventually, I added coaching to what I do to earn a living. My other niche is creating marketing communications for clients.

At Case Western Reserve University I had studied counseling. In Salem, Massachusetts and in Point Pleasant, New Jersey I had been tutored in doing intuitive readings.

About Coaching



The focus of the coaching is you.

You look at where you are and where you need or want to be. Then, together we put together an action plan to get there. In marketing that's called A/B testing. In aging, that's called survival.

If Plan A doesn't produce results, then you and I move on to experimenting with other strategies and tactics.

Please treat yourself to a complimentary 15-minute consultation. No pressure. Your takeaway will be at least one action plan.

Coaching sessions are provided in 15 and 30 minute segments. Fees are arranged on a sliding scale. This is my mission. Not how I earn the lion's share of my living.

You can arrange your first step in creating your life for the next 50+ years by emailing janegenova374@gmail.com.

Testimonials



Mark Misercola – Speechwriter

“For the past two years, Jane has helped me age more gracefully by opening my eyes to new opportunities and endeavors that will serve me well when I eventually retire. And some – like writing about my passion for collectible cars – I’ve already started on.”

Tara Belsare – Physician

“Jane encourages me to examine aging with depth and wit. She encourages me to write about the process. She has opened my eyes to the fact that I am, in fact aging.”

Name Confidential – Disbarred Lawyer

“I was almost 70 years old when, together, Jane and I figured out my Next.”