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Life in the Second Youth

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Life in the Second Youth

By Donna Cochran

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of English in the

Norman J. Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

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Introduction

In this document, I will be presenting my capstone project, which has been six years in the making. I have built a website entitled “Life in the Second Youth,” which focuses on assisting senior citizens, their families, and caregivers with avenues to research and connect these clients with links to professionals and other areas of the Internet where information can be gathered and shared on topics such as federal benefits, insurance agencies, movers, and legal advice. My target audiences are threefold. First, I want to reach out to members of the Baby Boomers generation, individuals who were born before 1964, and have either fully retired or will be within the next five years. The second group I want to speak to are the children of the Boomers. I call these the in-betweens since they are still raising their families while dealing with their aging parents. This group is in the unenviable position of slowly switching places with their parents while being parents themselves, and at the same time trying to still maintain their own identity. The third group is the independent caretakers. These are people who work for organizations such as *Visiting Angels* or in long-term care facilities.

In preparation for creating this website, I conducted several forms of research. I wrote my own autoethnography exploring the relationship with my mother until her death in 2014 at the age of eighty-eight. She was the inspiration for this project. I conducted IRB approved interviews with three individuals from two sets of the intended audiences for a total of six interviews; three were men and women in their seventies and retired, three were men and women in their late thirties and forties, with at least one parent still living and children of their own, along with their own careers. These interviews gave great insight on what information each group thought important as they move forward in their own lives, recognizing the needs of aging family members as well as their own future needs.

Nonprofits are such a huge asset in their client's health, well-being, and socialization, but they can be underutilized. I did research on these organizations in my county in the hopes of bringing their work and resources to the forefront of the targeted audience. In this discussion I concentrated on not only data from assistance to well-being, but also on opportunities for personal interaction such as a golf group. I also looked into websites catering to one of my core audiences, Baby Boomers. Each website offered great information but were mainly static and did not encourage interaction between the sites and the audience. This, in my opinion, was the biggest flaw in all of the websites I studied. It is my belief that these sites are visited to gather information and have questions answered. If a query is not listed on the "FAQ" page, then there is no way to ask. I not only performed this research for content but also design analysis. I wanted to know what was successful and what was not.

In this capstone, I am providing background information as to what I am doing and why. I will then present and discuss my research results, what I learned from my interviews, visits to organizations, and interactions with other similar sites, along with how this project began on one path, then grew and expanded. Finally, I present my website content and social media plan.

An Idea is Born

Sometime during the early morning hours of April 6, 1977, my father, Harvest Cochran, passed away when his heart stopped beating. My sister found him. As of April 7, 1977, my mother no longer had any income. There was a life insurance policy that paid for his funeral, and the mortgage on my childhood home. The small amount that was left over was put into a savings account, but that did not last long. There was no retirement savings, no 401(k), (they did not exist back then) and since he was self-employed there was no pension. So, my mother went to work full time and her bills were paid.

Thirteen years later, Mama officially retired at the age of sixty-five, and began receiving Daddy's social security retirement income. She was also eligible for a small pension from the Veterans Administration. Her total income from these was less than \$10,000 per year - so, she went back to work. Mother was the one who ran the house. She paid the bills; she obtained the insurance; she negotiated the car payments. We, her children, thought she had everything under control when it came to issues such as Social Security, Medicare, and Veterans benefits. She did not.

Twenty years later, after her health began to decline and my sister moved in with her, which turned into a debacle, my nephew was reading the newspaper, and discovered that the Veterans Administration offered so many benefits that she was qualified for but not receiving. He filled out the paperwork and mailed it in. I was not aware of any of this until after my sister passed away in 2013, but apparently, she was receiving notifications from the Veterans Administration (VA) regularly requesting more information. I discovered all of this in 2013, after my sister passed away. My nephew told my brother and myself about this application. We then spent the next year trying to cut through the red tape at the VA. I was on the phone at 8:00 in the morning at least once per week with no answers. I visited satellite offices in Atlanta and Carrollton, to no avail. The only information I ever received was that the application was under review, and we should know something soon.

Then, around September of 2013, I wrote to Johnny Isakson, the United States Senator for our jurisdiction, asking for his help. Meanwhile my brother also received the name of a VA case worker housed in the Canton office and made an appointment. These two people started to make things happen. However, the day we left the Canton office, it was discovered that our mother had pneumonia, and she never fully recovered. The first week of February 2014, when I called the

VA, I was finally told that her application had made it through all the necessary desks and was coming up for review in two weeks. On February 10th, the week before she was going to be approved, Mama succumbed. While we notified social security right away, I must admit, I didn't want to notify the Veterans Administration. She was so close to an answer and I felt that she deserved the back benefits. However, social security did the notification. The application process stopped.

Social Security pays burial benefits of \$255, to one member of a family. We used this money to pay part of Daddy's funeral. The VA is supposed to reimburse for a funeral, but even though it has been six years since we put in the claim, we still have not received a dime. Mother did not have burial insurance, so my sister-in-law was kind enough to use part of her inheritance from her own mother to bury mine. It was around this time that the realization came to me that there are others out there in the same black hole of red tape we were in. So, an idea began forming in my mind. What if there was one place on the Internet where people could go to and ask questions about benefits or facilities or Medicare so that they would not have to make this search their fulltime job?

An Idea is Expanded

As I was researching and talking to people who would be part of my target audience, the idea began to broaden. I was discovering that yes, there are people who need to find the assistance around red tape, but due to living longer, other questions have cropped up.

In January of 2013, my sister passed away, and I took over the care and feeding of my mother, which led to my attempting to find extra benefits and assistance for her. After her death in February 2014, I found myself at loose ends, grieving for my mother and my sister, and with

no job, I had nothing to keep me busy during the day. As the saying goes, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, except to get off the track I was on. In 2014, when I found myself unemployed and quickly aging out of the job market, my nephew talked me into going to college to finally obtain my degree. I was accepted to Kennesaw State University and began taking classes in August of 2014. After fits and starts, I finally landed in the English department, and in 2019, graduated with my Bachelor of Arts degree in English. This decision led me to the path I wanted to follow.

Even though 2014 was one of the most difficult years of my life, it taught me so much about myself while giving me a new direction and dream for my life. I decided I wanted to build a website to help those in the same boat I found myself in so that they had a place to begin when looking for benefits, care, and living situations for those we consider elderly. I began taking every technology course that the English Department offered and even applied to the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program at Kennesaw State University. I began designing the website in my head, and even named it "Navigating Eldercare." The more I thought about this, the more excited I became.

As I began making plans, I began brainstorming with my family, friends, and instructors. With each conversation, the ideas for my website began to expand. I noticed that more and more seniors were moving to active adult communities, their insurance needs were changing, and more than a last will and testament would be needed. I have geared much of my life toward this project during the past six years. A funny thing happened along the way. I discovered that as part of the Baby Boom generation (currently the senior citizen generation,) I have actually become a member of my own audience.

Who are the Baby Boomers?

Baby Boomers. Individuals born between 1946 and 1964 make up the largest generation recorded since generational statistics have been gathered. After World War II, people were moving from farms and rural areas, creating the suburbs, and obtaining steady work at a living wage. This was one of America's greatest periods of prosperity, and the birth rate spiked significantly (Barnier). Also, notable medical advances included the discovery of antibiotics, development of vaccines, and even use of x-rays, which lead to the declination in the death rate.

With each passing year, more medical technology is discovered, people are eating better, getting more exercise, and smoking is on the decline. What this means is that more and more people are living longer. It is no longer unusual for men and women to live well into their eighties and nineties. Most of these older adults still have clear minds and healthy bodies. They want to be active and keep control of their lives (Barnier). The Boomers are still a viable and relevant generation and should never be discounted.

When the Millennials phrase of "O K Boomer" became so prevalent on social media, it seemed as if the younger generations see the Baby Boomers as becoming irrelevant (Tannenbaum). Nothing could be further from the truth. Boomers are more active, more financially secure, more attentive to their physical and mental health, and more aware of the importance of their lived experiences. They are travelling more, buying more luxury cars, and willing to spend more on amenities for their living situation. In other words, they want to be active, comfortable, and just enjoy life after spending so many years in the work force. Seniors are going back to school and changing careers, and they are now trying to reach the goals and the dreams that they didn't fulfil in their twenties and thirties. Why should they be considered old instead of entering their "second youth?"

The Culture of Aging Boomers

The Baby Boomers are a unique generation. Forty years ago, they refused to live by the status quo; currently they are refusing to age gracefully. After decades of defying their parents, rejecting the government mandates, and challenging a belief system they felt was wrong and unfair, they are now taking that philosophy into another war— while they must get older, they are also saying “no” to getting old.

Eating healthy is on the rise, smoking is on the decline, exercise is at an all-time high, and managing stress is prioritized. It is even not unusual to see Boomers participating in extreme sports. Before the COVID-19 in 2020 hit, they travelled all over the country and the world discovering new places and facing new adventures. They join dating sites and take acting lessons.

Even though many are retiring from their full-time jobs, often before reaching age sixty-five, Boomers are not retiring from working life. They are going back to school to begin new career paths, volunteering at hospitals and nonprofit organizations, and are taking a more active role in their churches and even becoming missionaries. The Social Security Administration now rewards people who wait until age seventy to collect their retirement benefits by increasing their maximum retirement benefits.

An Idea Comes into Existence

As they age, Boomers are facing new and different situations. They need financial advice to ensure that their money lasts ten or twenty years longer. They are weighing the options of selling their homes and downsizing or even renting so that they have more free time. There are other options such as reverse mortgages to have more funds available. But what are the consequences

of these decisions? That is the purpose of this project and the driving force of the website and blog; to answer the questions and discover the consequences before making major mistakes that may not be able to be undone.

From all of these ideas, dreams, conversations, and research. I reimagined the website I originally named “Navigating Eldercare,” added a blog, expanded the pages, and changed the name, and now my capstone is “Life in the Second Youth.” The website will have several different pages with each being dedicated to one particular industry or focus, such as real estate or mental health. I also want to post items such as scam warnings. There will be links to government agencies as well. Again, I have spent hours on the Internet, only this time my focus was completely different. Using keywords such as “Eldercare,” I looked for the type of website I am building, and I could find none. I went to major websites to not only see what they offer, but also the look and feel of those sites so I would get a feel of what works and what I think needs to be changed or tweaked. I researched benefits for retirees, and also interviewed individuals where I asked for their feedback to determine their needs and wants in this type of endeavor. I want to provide access to professionals who can help my target audience members with the questions that are now being faced by so many Americans and possibly provide for them a path to the answers.

Autoethnography

Who Am I and Why Am I Here

As a child too young to understand, as a daughter too wrapped up in growing up, then as a caregiver too ill prepared, I discovered that I overlooked signs and did not always see what was happening with my mother. I spent several years trying to get her out of an unhealthy situation, then eventually became her full-time caregiver. I found myself totally overwhelmed in an unfamiliar territory. After all was said and done, I began to analyze what my mother and I went through to discover my mistakes and also to find a way to help others as they find themselves with the daunting task of working with their parents as they enter the final phase of life.

I Was A Child

It was just something you know intrinsically. I cannot remember a time when I did not know my mother, Daicy Davis, took her first breath on May 3, 1925. Then after years of deaths and births of family members, marriage and divorce and re-marriage, working and retiring, Daicy Davis Cochran took her last breath on February 10, 2014, at the age of eighty-eight. I know this because after she was pronounced, the nurse called and gave me the sad news. From that afternoon in November when her doctor informed my brother, Harold, and me that she would never fully recover from the pneumonia which had invaded her body, I was able to spend roughly four hours a night sitting by her side. So, when my phone rang in the wee hours that morning, I knew what it meant, and I was not surprised.

After I got off the phone with the nurse, Harold and I decided to meet at the funeral home the next morning to plan the service. My two daughters and I met at the facility to say our goodbyes and wait for the mortician to pick her up. As I stood there by her bed where, as cliché as it sounds, she looked as if she were in deep slumber, I couldn't help but think that this was the first

time in at least twenty years that she looked totally at peace. Even though I knew I was going to miss her so much, I also knew that Mama was finally right where she wanted to be.

In between her birth and death, Daicy married her one true love, gave birth to four children, got a divorce, re-married her true love, then said good-bye to him a scant seven years later. I saw her experience loss frequently in her lifetime. I witnessed as she said good-bye one-by-one to six of her brothers and sisters. Twenty-two years after the devastating loss of my father, the family buried a niece, a great-nephew, and then my oldest sister, June, whose death was the worst loss for me personally, as she was more like a mother to me than a sister. She was always there to dry my tears, make me laugh, and set me back on the straight and narrow if she thought I was heading in the wrong direction. Sometimes I think June's death affected me more than any other event in my life.

I could never fully explain what my sister meant to my family, but especially to me as a sister, a second mom, a friend, and an adversary. She was such a rare person, not perfect by any means, but as close as I will ever meet in my lifetime. Since June was nine years older than me, it was almost natural that she would be the older sister/second mother. As a cook June far outshined my mother in the kitchen—and it was she that baked all the desserts in the house. She also planned all the vacations we took together as an extended family, ensuring that we stayed close and enjoyed our time together. The family always thought it was Mother that was the glue that held our family together, but after my sister's death, we discovered it truly was June. Even now, I miss her the most.

It was so difficult to watch as Mama spiraled into a chasm of anger, bitterness, and depression. While I know she was grieving and lonely after losing my father—the only man she ever loved—at the young age of fifty-one, I was happy that she tried to live a normal life after

Daddy's death; she worked, she retired, she worked again. She was healthy and lucid and still ruling her family with a velvet gloved iron fist well into her late seventies. Then when Mama was roughly seventy-two, it was discovered that she needed a knee replacement. She seemed eager to do this, even scheduling the surgery herself; however, two days before the operation, she was given information that this doctor may not be the best choice after my cousin discovered that some of his operations did not go as planned.

I saw the pain she was in constantly. We then went on the hunt to find her another doctor but, I think the delayed operation gave her the time to think about it, and she became afraid of the surgery. It was difficult to watch Mama suffer and not be able to do anything about it. She didn't let it slow her down too much—then at least. After losing child and grandchildren, especially in such a close time frame, she decided that her knees were too damaged, and she sat down, literally. This was the most difficult to deal with. Her physical and mental health began to decline rapidly. No matter how much I talked, begged, cajoled, threatened, and cried, Mama would only shut me down and say how much it hurt. I didn't realize it then, but I now know she was talking about more than her knee, she was talking about waking up every morning.

I Was A Daughter

As I stated, I am the youngest of the four. What I didn't say was that there is a seven-year gap between the next to youngest Eva, and myself. It felt as though overnight, my siblings all moved out of the house and went to college and married. I finally had a bedroom of my own that I was able to decorate with all my stuffed animals and "teen idol" posters. I no longer had to compete for phone time. Even having three less people using the one bathroom made a huge difference. I discovered the pleasure of long, hot baths. This afforded me the chance to be a typical teenager who could focus on herself, and less on family concerns. As the youngest, it was not expected for

me to take on many of the family responsibilities. It was June, as the oldest daughter, that was being groomed as the matriarch, and she was the best candidate. Her wisdom, strength, and love really was the glue that held our family together.

In the years surrounding June's death, Eva had become a victim of alcohol and drugs. This left me to take over as the matriarch, a role I was thrown into, which I was unprepared for and didn't want. I felt helpless as I watched my family disintegrate seemingly right before my eyes. Every time I stepped foot in that house all I could feel was the depression, oppression, and suppression that permeated every inch. While I had previously visited almost daily, and called two or three times a day, my trips became further and further apart. It felt as though the only reason anyone wanted me around was to give money in one form or another. I would try to begin conversations with Mama, to no avail.

Both my mother and sister decided to give up. The house was never clean. Groceries and cooking were no longer a priority. All either wanted to do was sit, smoke, and watch television. I would spend all day each Saturday cleaning Mama's house: changing the beds, doing laundry, cleaning the bathrooms, and dusting the furniture. Mountains of trash and dishes were carted out of the bedrooms and had to be washed by hand after disinfecting the kitchen sink. Each room would be sparkling when I left it. Then I noticed that by the time I finished the next room, the one I had just cleaned was again destroyed. After about two months, I decided that my energy was better off placed elsewhere.

I was becoming angry and frustrated myself. Communication was never easy between Mama and me, but now it was becoming impossible. The frustration then turned into guilt; the guilt would invariably circle back to anger. How could Mama choose to live this way? I would try to talk to her; I would try to talk to Eva. They both decided I was the problem and that I wanted to

throw Eva out into the street and take over the house for myself. When I had the opportunity to move to Boston in 2009 for two years, I jumped at the chance. It felt so good to be away from the drama, for a little while at least.

I wanted Mama to be active again—to go play bingo, to visit family, to travel again. I tried to get her to join the local Senior Center, but she refused. I tried to get her to get knee replacement surgery. I took her to the doctor three times to get the clearance, but each time she literally had a heart attack. We would be in the doctor's office waiting for the clearance letter after she passed the stress test. Before the doctor could make it back into the examining room, I would have to ring for the nurse to confirm Mama was having a heart attack. Fortunately, the doctor's office was a breezeway walk from the hospital, where I would spend the next two or three days while she recovered. The attacks were always mild enough that she didn't need surgery, but after the third one, the attempt to get her knee replacements stopped. She never had another heart attack after that. The decision to give up on knee replacement for her was heart-breaking for me. I had the mistaken idea that if I were able to help her physically, then the rest would magically fall into place, but I had to give up on the dream of her being able to move more freely.

I Was A Caregiver

It is a terrible thing to say, but it was really a relief when Eva passed away in January of 2013. I loved my sister so much. When I was young, I admired and wanted to emulate Eva. She was pretty and athletic, and the most popular girl in school. After she succumbed completely to her addictions, I spent over ten years grieving for the sister I grew up with. By the time Eva left this world, she was a stranger that I no longer wanted to be around and didn't trust her with my mother's care. I saw this as an opportunity to take care of Mama, and hopefully make her remaining years more comfortable and happier. I so wanted to reconnect with my mother and

start over, but it was almost as if Eva's death was the worst loss for her. Mama and Eva were more like an old married couple rather than mother and daughter. They both had the misguided idea that each was the only one who could care for the other and the only one who could understand what the other was going through. Her death was, I believe, the last straw for Mama. She had lost so much already there was no strength left. It was decided at that time that I would take over the care and feeding of Mother. I temporarily left my house to move in with her. I was happy to do it; I was excited to do it. All my life, I had loved Mama so much, but I knew that even though I was loved, I was not loved as much as the others. I saw this as a time of possibility, a time when Mama and I could connect and become close.

Over the next six months, Mother's physical health began to come back. She was eating regularly, living in a clean house, and getting her medication daily. We were able to purchase hearing aids for her and she had cataract surgery. The first few months following Eva's death, she agreed a few times to leave the house to go out to eat or visit relatives, and we even went to Savannah to visit my cousin. But with each passing day, she continued to become more angry and bitter. She refused to get any type of exercise and complained constantly that her knees hurt. She had what I called "couch dementia," asking the same few questions over and over; "What day is it?" "Did I have lunch?" "Has my favorite program come on yet?" She only wanted to sit in her chair and watch television. We could get along well for twenty-four hours, then during the twenty-fifth, she would get upset about something and rant and rave and yell for about an hour. I would fix her a cup of coffee and leave the house for a little while. Once I returned, she would have calmed down and everything would be okay until the next day, when she would pitch another fit. I was afraid to leave her alone for longer than two or three hours at a time so I

couldn't be gone long. I slowly came to the realization that I couldn't live this way. I was in way over my head, and I had no idea how to help her.

I had already begun researching ways that I could offer my mother a healthier and happier lifestyle in the last years of her life. I had no idea what benefits were available to her through Social Security. My nephew had discovered that she was eligible for more benefits from the Veterans Administration but working through the red tape there was next to impossible. I had to go back to work, so it was imperative that I find some way for her to be taken care of during the day. Home health care professionals, available through such companies as *Visiting Angels*, are everywhere today. In 2013, I could find no information on such assistance. Even *Care.com* was just for babysitting then. I spent hours on the phone and the Internet trying to find answers to my questions. I spent time and gas visiting long term care facilities searching for the best fit for her. The main answer I came away with from each place was that if Social Security was her only source of income, they would not be able to help. A spot finally opened up for her in a nursing home and because it was attached to the local hospital, they accepted her Social Security as payment. It was a nice facility with a truly caring staff. However, she felt we forced her out of her home, and she was miserable.

At that time, I was fifty-six-years-old, and my mother was eighty-eight. She passed away in February 2014—thirteen months after Eva's death—and miserable with the conditions she was living in. I lost my mother without finding the answers for her I was so desperately seeking. I needed to get her VA benefits started, I wanted to be able to find affordable in-home care for her, I wanted to find her a long-term facility that felt more like an apartment and less like a hospital room. I needed to find a way to make sure she was taken care of without stripping her of her dignity and taking all control away from her. I kept telling myself that I only wanted what was

best for her, that I wanted her to be healthy and enjoy life and even have fun. Perhaps, though, I was really trying to make her into a version of herself that I wanted her to be. Maybe I needed her to depend on me so that there would be a sense of closeness there, even if it was just an illusion. Was I trying to make her over to fit the vision I had in my head? I feel that I failed her in that last year. Perhaps the decisions I made accelerated her demise. I can only hope that she is now happy being reunited with her husband and daughters.

I Am An Activist

After my grieving period, I came to a realization; I was rapidly coming to the age where I was going to be unemployable. It was my hope that if I had a degree to go with my experience, this task might be a little easier. I applied to and was accepted into Kennesaw State University in 2014. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English a week before my sixty-second birthday in May of 2019. When I discovered that I may actually be able to support myself with my degree, I then made another decision and applied to the Master of Arts in Professional Writing program to begin in August of 2019. And when I got in, I posted the acceptance letter right over my desk so that I could see it every day. If someone was in my company for more than five minutes, they knew I was accepted to graduate school.

Since my mother's death, I have had plenty of time to think about the journey I took with her. I feel that there was so much more that I could have done that would have prolonged her life. I feel guilty that I was unable to live with her full time. I just was not willing to remain the obedient child that she wanted me to remain. She wanted to continue to rule me, and I finally found my voice with her. I was no longer afraid to tell her no, but she still didn't like hearing it. Mama was never the type to give up control. She was very passive-aggressive, then when that didn't work to her favor, she would become aggressive with her words and attitude.

Had I been able to find an affordable solution for in-home care during the day so I could have returned to work or even school, living with my mother may have been more bearable. As it was, I felt trapped, with all the responsibility heaped on me. All of this has been in the forefront of my mind for the past six years. Even though I have worked with computers in my professional life, I never became what I would call computer savvy. I began taking courses as both an undergraduate and a graduate student that would further expand my knowledge, understanding, and therefore my comfort level of using technology. I have designed projects around this idea that I have for my website and blog. I even decided that my capstone should revolve around such an important— and just maybe life-enhancing— project. There are so many others in the same situation I found myself dropped in the middle of. I want to help them learn from my mistakes. I want to build a place where I can attempt to ask the questions I was asking, but I want to go one step further and provide a forum where professionals are accessible to give the answers that were so elusive to me.

In order to fulfill this project, I submersed myself into the culture of retirees, of which I am now one. I will be researched websites such as *American Association of Retired Persons* (AARP), *Visiting Angels*, and *A Place for Mom*. I will continue looking into Social Security, Medicare, and Veterans Administration benefits for retirees, veterans and their widows. In order to accomplish my goal, I conducted interviews with members of two of my target audiences; the fifty-five pluses as well as the “in-between” members of their families. Professionals in their fields, such as law, finance, and insurance will be interviewed. I want to make it easier for people of a certain age to make the best decisions for themselves, their families, and their caregivers.

In this, my last semester of grad school, I managed to set my schedule where I teach two one-hour classes three days a week. Other than that, I have been able to devote much of the semester

to *Life in the Second Youth*. I have interviewed members from two groups of my target audience. I have researched nonprofits, not only for the information and assistance they provide, but also to provide links to their services. I have spent time on the Internet investigating website hosts and social media platforms so that I understand the differences between them and I now feel I made the right choices for my organization. I have set a target date of September 2021 to be fully up and running to make this dream a reality.

In Conclusion

While writing this and remembering what my mother and I went through, I came to several revelations. First, Mama had serious depression, and this quite possibly accelerated her dementia and anger issues. In my eagerness to help, I was providing the wrong kind of help. Second, as a member of this sub-culture myself now, I know that Baby Boomer Seniors are facing issues our predecessor generations never thought of. As with any group, we fall into two major categories: the healthy and less healthy. While the healthy do have minor issues, most are fortunate enough to be well-off financially, mentally, and physically. Then there are those who are falling victim to chronic physical ailments, such as diabetes and heart disease. Too often mental disease, such as dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, steals our loved ones away. Such chronic conditions can be devastating to a family's mental and financial well-being. Both the healthy and less healthy groups have questions that they are looking to have answered, want to ensure their families are taken care of, and are afraid of becoming a burden to their children and society. Wouldn't it be wonderful if both groups, the seniors and the in-betweeners, had an avenue where they could find answers to the questions they are now asking?

ABOUT ME PAGE ON WEBSITE

My Story

When my mother reached the age of eighty-seven, it became apparent that she could no longer live alone and care for herself. My brother and I began looking for solutions to this issue. I didn't know where to begin-what benefits she was entitled to, which type of care would be best for her, or what legal forms I needed.

Because there was no one place to help me find the answers I needed, I spent many hours searching the Internet, touring assisted living homes, and researching Social Security and Veterans Administration benefits. I became angry and frustrated. The time I spent doing this was time taken away from her care. Because I saw first-hand how time consuming and at times unproductive this process was, I am building my web site and blog to assist other families with this difficult time in their lives.

Adults are living longer and are more active than ever. Retirees may be looking to downsize and move into Active Adult Communities. Unfortunately, due to living longer, long term solutions due to illness or disability may be needed: in addition, legal questions, such as wills, living wills, power of attorneys, and probate are going to arise. Insurance needs may change as well. I am creating this website for people in the position that I was in by providing a platform where seniors, their children, and even caregivers can seek out answers in one spot. The search for answers by these individuals should not turn into a full-time job; there are so many questions, but not an easy way to find the answers. I am attempting to at least point people in the right direction. I am not qualified to offer any legal or insurance advice but will link to blogs and other resources that will enable professionals to answer these questions. I will also be adding links to Social Security and VA. In order to aid you in this search, I will update the site regularly.

ELEVATOR PITCH

During the year after my mother died, and I was in the grieving process, I realized that there was a need for a “one stop shop” type of website where seniors, their families, and even their caregivers could go for advice and search for benefits. As I was designing my website it began to take on a life of its own, and now has expanded into an interactive website and blog where this same audience can look into issues such as keeping the too big home versus moving into a 55+ community or if the local community center offers line dancing and yoga lessons.

In the fall of 2014, I became a student at Kennesaw State University, and received my Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 2019. I took every technology course I could find in the department and applied to the Master of Arts in Professional Writing program there. For my capstone, I am building a website to provide access to professionals who can help my target audience members with the questions that are now being faced by so many Americans as they face retirement and “Enter the Second Youth.”

Research Methods

For my capstone project, I am building a website and blog for seniors, their family members, and caregivers. It is my wish to provide a place where questions can be asked, and answers sought. I made a list of fourteen questions for seniors over the age of fifty-five and twenty questions for the “in-between” generation, ages thirty-five to fifty. These questions are extremely important to my capstone, as they set the tone for the website and blog I want to build. I need to know what members of each section of my target audience is looking for, what their respective needs are, and what additional information are they looking into. A list of these questions will be included with the capstone documents I will be submitting.

I spent one week setting up and conducting interviews. I talked with three individuals in their seventies, one man and two women. I also talked with two women and one man between the ages of thirty-eight and forty-eight. All individuals were chosen based on their differing circumstances with aging, which will be explained in the analysis. There was also one “outlier” who, due to her circumstances, fell into both groups. Since the seniors are my foremost target audience, I will be analyzing their answers first. Their answers, especially to questions such as “what would your personal website look like” or “what types of pages would you be looking for” will be more of a guiding tool in the design.

Group One—Seniors over Fifty-Five

I chose each individual I interviewed within each group very carefully, as I wanted a good mix of education, employment, health, and income situations. I felt this would give a clear indication of the different types of information this generation is looking for. I also wanted to know how computer savvy seniors are since technology has changed drastically in the past

twenty years. I have broken down the categories of the questions into four headings: 1) Age, Education, and Employment, 2) Economics, Housing, and Health, 3) Technology, and 4) Life in the Second Youth. I gave each interviewee an alias in order to not have any identifiers.

I interviewed these individuals based on certain criteria that I had set forth. Each had to be over fifty-five years of age, collecting social security retirement, and still be healthy and active. I then looked for differing criteria, such as level of education, marital status, employment history, and future endeavors.

Group Two—In-Betweens Ages 35 – 50

Once again, I chose subjects with varying educational, career, and family descriptions; however, here I added the criteria of differing children's ages along with parental relationships. This would give a clear indication of the different types of information this generation is looking for, not only because they are assisting their parents in this time of each of generations lives, but also due to the fact that it will not be that many more years before the "in-betweeners" will transfer to the senior generation. Therefore, I felt it necessary to add two additional categories bringing the total to six headings: 1) Age, Education, and Employment, 2) Economics, Housing and Health, 3) Balance of Life as an In-Between, 4) Parental Future Conversations, 5) Technology, and 6) Life in the Second Youth. They, too, were given aliases.

I interviewed these individuals based on certain criteria that I had set forth. Each had to be older than thirty-five, but no older than fifty, with ideally no one over the age of forty-five years of age. Each should be actively employed and have at least two children. At least one parent should still be living. I then looked for differing criteria, such as level of education, marital status, employment history, and future endeavors.

Nonprofit Research

I concentrated my research into nonprofits in the Paulding County area, since that is the area in which I live, and most selected are local chapters of state and even federal offices. COVID has impacted these organizations, and currently, most of my research has been done using telephone calls. Likewise, many of the services that these offices have been offering have been suspended as well; however, since some restrictions have been relaxed and vaccines are available, some services are slowly being reintroduced.

Website Research

Because of the type of website I intended to build, it was imperative that I research other websites for three reasons. First, I needed to check for direct competition, to ensure there were no other sites that already offer the type of information in the format that my site calls for, and I found none. Next came the in-direct competition research to see what other types of services were offered on the web that could be linked from my site, such as long-term care options, games for seniors, nonprofit organizations, and even governmental links. Third and final was to look over these sites for design ideas and what to stay away from. I used keywords such as “elderly issues web sites” while also searching for particular websites such as *AARP*. This research was invaluable as it showed that my website will be unique, gave me design ideas, and even provided links to other sites that my target audience may be interested in.

List of Interviewees – 55+ Group

“Alice”— Seventy-year-old retired worker who held down many jobs over the course of her life, but really had no career. In her forties, she returned to school and obtained an undergraduate degree and then a master’s degree in social work. She is divorced and currently lives with her daughter and son-in-law. I chose “Alice” because she represents many of the women in this particular age group. She married young, had no formal career, and when her marriage dissolved, had no retirement savings or financial plans.

“Ben”— Seventy-seven-year-old retired educator who began a new career as a real estate agent. He is still very active, but his wife is suffering from a chronic disease that is well managed. I chose Ben because he fits well into the male description of the Baby Boomer Generation. He stayed in one career during his working life prior to retirement. His wife had her own career during the marriage and is also retired from that industry.

“Carla”— Seventy-three-year-old retired Library Historian and Archivist who is currently a graduate student in the MAPW Program at Kennesaw State University. She holds two other master’s degrees as well as a doctorate in History. I chose Carla her unique life experiences identity due to her education and work; however, Carla does fit into this generation very well and is interested in assisting with the creation of this website.

OUTLIER

“Yvonne”—Sixty-four-year-old retired teacher who is currently running her own at-home business and is heavily involved in her local chapter of a national nonprofit society. She holds undergraduate, master, and specialist degrees in education. As she was a single mom for many years, her education assisted with her ability to provide for her family until she remarried.

List of Interviewees – In-Between Group

“Nancy” – College educator at a major university. She is married with two young daughters. Her parents live several hours away from her home and her father is basically bed-ridden.

“Karl” – Manages contact center for big box store. He is divorced and has two children, both in their early twenties, one of which is still in college. His father passed away in 2020, and he is currently living with his mother to assist with her transition from wife to widow.

“Lisa” – Working for a local bank, she is a manager in their IT Department. She is married with two children, one who is a driving teenager and the other is a pre-teen. Her husband has been declared medically disabled, and Lisa is the sole provider of the family. Her mother lives with her to help with the household as well as the younger child.

OUTLIER

“Yvette” – While she is a member of the 55+ group, she still qualifies for the In-Between group due to the fact that she still cares for her mother and is the sole caretaker of her sixty-year-old mentally disabled sister who lives in an apartment in Yvette’s basement.

Interview Questions for 55 and Over Group

1. How old are you? Which decade are you in?
2. Did you work consistently in the same field? If so, which field?
3. Have you officially retired from that field?
4. Have you entered another field of employment or have you gone back for more education?
5. Are you currently collecting social security retirement?
6. Do you have any specific issues you are dealing with? Ill health of yourself or spouse? Safe Travelling? Downsizing? Obtaining New Employment? Returning to School?
7. Do you have any specific question you need assistance with? If so, what topic?
8. Would you be interested in having a website that would direct you to places to obtain the answers?
9. Are you comfortable using the Internet? Do you have your own computer?
10. If you were to design a website, what would it look like? What colors and font would you use?
11. What types of pages would you be looking for? Would you like links attached to other websites? Social Security Administration, Veterans Administration, Games for Seniors, Non-Profit Organizations?
12. Do you use any social media platforms? If so, which ones?

13. Do you think you will have additional questions in the future that you would be attempting to find answers for? Are there any specific topics you would like discussed or want to research?

14. Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions?

Interview Questions for In-Between Group

1. Are you willing to tell me how old you are? Or, in which decade are you?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your marital status?
5. Do you have children? If so, what are their ages?
6. How active are their lives?
7. What is your parental status? Both living, one still living, or none still living?
8. What are their occupations? Are they retired?
9. Do they own their own home?
10. How is their health?
11. Have you talked about their future, and your responsibility as they age?

12. Are you willing to become their caregiver if necessary?
13. Have you had the difficult discussions about life-extension, interment wishes, living wills, do not resuscitate orders, and final will and testament?
14. Do you feel completely out of control, that you are being torn between the two generations while still trying to live your life?
15. Have you been able to find any balance?
16. Do you consider yourself “web savvy?”
17. What types of activity do you normally do on the web? Banking? Shopping?
Informational Searches? Travel?
18. Do you use social media? If so, which platforms?
19. How would a website catch your eye? Color, font, visuals?
20. If you could build your own website for yourself and your parents, what would it look like?

Interview Analysis

Group One – Seniors over 55

In this section, I will be discussing the aliases of “Alice,” “Ben,” and “Carla.”

Age, Education, and Employment

Subject number one is “Alice,” a seventy-year-old lady who has worked in varied fields from retail to artisan to accounting to daycare to running her church’s office. In 1994, she returned to college to receive her bachelor’s degree in sociology and anthropology, with the hopes of becoming a social worker. She then received her master’s degree while working as a graduate research assistant. After her completion of her graduate degree, Alice became a substitute teacher and now owns her own daycare; however, Alice wanted to take a different path after she received her degree.

“Ben,” who is subject number two is seventy-seven with a master’s degree in education, which was his career until retirement. After he left the school system, he decided that he was too young to quit working, so, he studied for and obtained his real estate license. Because of his knowledge of the people and housing market in the community in which he resides, he has found great success as a real estate agent.

At the age of seventy-five, “Carla,” subject number three, is now a student in the Master’s of Arts in Professional Writing. Carla spent an entire career as a librarian, using her undergraduate degree in history as well her master’s degree and PhD in library science. After retiring from the state library system, Carla then obtained her second master’s degree, hoping to become a social worker. Like Alice, Carla did not find employment in that field. Unlike Alice, Carla was not in need of the supplemental income, but she did want to get paid for her work. While all three have

continued their educations after retirement in the hopes of changing career paths, two took advantage of opportunities within the university system, obtaining undergraduate and master's degrees.

Even though the trend here is that all three have taken classes after retirement so that their careers could change, only Ben made a transition that generated a second income (in his case, in the field of real estate). Alice is generating a supplemental income but, it is not in the field in which she studied. Both Alice and Carla have received offers to work with social advocacy organizations, but only as unpaid volunteers. These agencies are extremely eager to obtain the services of these well-educated and highly experienced individuals, as long as the candidates are not looking for compensation. Although no formal complaints have been raised, this suggests discrimination based upon age. Seniors add value to these companies as trainers and coordinators, yet apparently not enough value to draw salaries. I realize that this is primarily my opinion, but my observations appear to lend credence to the suggestion. While this was not the focus of my study, the limitations placed on qualified seniors to move into careers later in life are troubling and are worth further investigation and research.

While the examples cited here may seem to suggest that college later in life may not lead to fruitful opportunities; however, this is not the case as there are a variety of reasons why college—even after retirement—can be valuable. Two of the biggest advantages of taking courses later in life are being active outside of the home, but most just want to keep their minds stimulated, learn something new or catch up with a subject they were always curious about but never had time for. (Grady) There is also the very real possibility of making an old dream finally come true, or to begin dreaming a new one.

Economics, Housing, and Health

The next items I was looked at was under the umbrella of finance. What impact did Alice, Ben, and Carla's pensions, living situations, and health issues have on their family finances? Are the families prepared in the event of a major catastrophe? How do finances affect the family dynamic?

All three subjects are collecting their social security retirement benefits, but their family finances are completely different. Since Alice is divorced and had jobs instead of a stable career, she has no other source of retirement income. She owns no real estate and lives with family where she is able to live rent free. This situation is not ideal but is the most sensible answer currently for her. Even though her personal bills are minimal, she still needs supplemental income, and has looked to childcare to provide the necessary extra.

Since Ben and Carla both worked for the state government, they both collect state pensions that add to the household income. Their spouses collect pensions as well since they were also educators. They both have paid off their homes and they have no intention of selling these homes unless ill health forces them into alternate living situations. Neither of them owns any other real estate—not even vacation homes—and do not plan to purchase additional properties. Ben does have a time-share that is used every other year for vacation purposes.

Currently all three are in excellent health. They keep active with their outside activities such as continuing education and supplemental jobs. All three are also very active with their children and grandchildren. The spouse of one does have a chronic illness but is managing the symptoms very well. During a flare-up, certain activities do cease, but the couple still spend as much time as possible with their family and travelling.

All three recognize the possibility of needing long-term care at some point, but all three are determined to live independently in their own homes as long as possible. The individual with the “ill” spouse, thus far, has been able to provide all necessary care needed without outside help or support. When that becomes too difficult, an organization like *Visiting Angel’s* will be hired to provide assistance.

Technology

Because the subject of my capstone is a website and blog, it was extremely important for me to ask about the participants about their comfort levels with technology. In 2017, 42% of individuals over the age of sixty-five owned (Perrin) cell phones. We use these instruments for person-to-person communication through phone calls, texts as well as social media messaging. We also take pictures with them and access the Internet as well. Nonetheless, modern technology can be tricky to navigate; therefore, I needed to make sure they were comfortable navigating more than Google searches and used the study to gain insights into their comfort levels with technology.

While all three are familiar with using a computer for shopping, banking, and even travel, there were clearly different levels of proficiency. Each represented that they are proficient with Microsoft Office and Google but reported a range of different websites used on a daily basis. For example, Ben uses Multiple Listing Service in his work as a real estate agent. All three have *Facebook* pages and *LinkedIn* accounts, while Alice’s grandchildren are the reason that she uses *Twitter* and *Instagram*. None of the three like or use *Snapchat* or *Tik Tok*. While all three are have had some dealings with virtual meeting software, because of the campus shutdown, Carla has become very familiar with *Zoom*, *Collaborate*, and *Teams*.

Life in the Second Youth

This last section is the most important for my project. I had to make sure that seniors are interested in and will use the options that I want to make available. I also wanted to hear any ideas they may want to be added to fit their lifestyles and needs. All three interviewees like the idea of this website and blog and feel it would be of value and benefit to the audience I am looking to reach. Upon asking each which color and font combination they would prefer, I discovered this does not concern any of them. What they are looking for is ease of use, with a clean, uncluttered, professional look. Layout is especially important. Alice suggested different looks for different pages, for example a legal page should be completely clean and professional, while links to games should have a more fun feeling.

All three I interviewed gave me great ideas for additional information that I had not thought of. For example, it appears seniors are unfortunately the largest targets for scams. I plan to have one page dedicated to the newest scams. Long term care insurance is another suggestion for the “in-between” group. Mental health was another suggestion, with the main focus on transitioning. For the seniors, sexuality and gender identity were basically taboo subjects for many years. Now this topic is becoming more acceptable, and a large group may want to learn more; however, after dealing with my mother’s concerns, I didn’t realize in time that she was suffering from depression and almost debilitating grief. I now wonder how much she could have actually benefited from talking to a professional. Perhaps as a member of the previous generation, she was too ashamed to ask for help. Perhaps she didn’t realize that her sadness was a deeper problem. Maybe she didn’t feel as though she had anyone in her life to talk to who would understand. I wish I had thought about maybe getting her into a support group at least. Maybe she wouldn’t have felt so all alone.

Group Two – In-Betweens Ages 35 – 50

Here I will be discussing the individuals I interviewed who are children of the seniors and are parents to younger children as well. I have given these subjects the aliases of “Nancy,” “Lisa,” and “Karl.”

Age, Education, and Employment

Subject one is “Nancy,” the youngest of the group. She is thirty-eight and married with two children, ages nine and six. She has a PhD in English and is a college educator. Like most other instructors, she teaches many different courses while also being responsible for supporting the technology needs of the department.

“Karl” is subject number two and has an undergraduate degree in political science. At forty-seven, he is the oldest member in this group. He began his career working in the House of Representatives in Washington, DC. Upon his return to Georgia, he became a trainer at a major cellular telephone provider and worked there for over fifteen years. Currently, he is a supervisor in the customer contact center at the headquarters of a big box store. He is divorced with two children. His oldest is twenty-two with a job and lives independently. His younger child is a twenty-year-old college sophomore.

Participant number three, “Lisa” turned forty in 2020. She is married with two children, ages seventeen and nine. She obtained an associates degree in human resources and has no desire to advance her own educational opportunities currently. She spent thirteen years working as a cashier/assistant manager at a widely known convenience store chain. She then spent two years in payroll and customer service at two smaller companies. When the opportunity arose, she made

the move to a bank and has “climbed the ladder” working her way through several departments until she landed in the Information Technology department where she is now a manager.

Economics, Housing, and Health

All three of the participants are gainfully employed and are in excellent health. The children, likewise, have no health issues and are active with school, jobs, sports, art clubs, play dates, etc. Also, support groups are important aspects of each family, whether it is extended family, a network of friends, or service in their church. None of the three describe themselves as affluent but see themselves as financially secure; Nancy and Lisa each own their own homes.

While there are similarities between each participant, each have different parental situations. Nancy has parents who live several hours away, and her father is in poor health, almost bedridden. Her mother takes care of him alone while still trying to manage their income-producing business. She described her parents as “young,” as neither have reached sixty-years-old yet. Nancy, as the only child, has tried to discuss selling the family home and moving closer to her, but these talks come to nothing. Due to employment opportunities, or lack thereof where the parents live, the in-betweeners cannot move to where the parents live. This is a source of contention because she experiences feelings of guilt, worry, and a desire to assist with the care of her father. It is also felt that the mother needs help as well, along with the realization that the grandchildren are missing out on valuable time spent with the grandparents.

Karl’s father passed away in 2020 at the age of seventy-three. He had been active in sports as a player and then a high school teacher and coach after graduating from college. Karl’s mother, a retired elementary school teacher, is still healthy and active, her main health issues are bad knees. Karl moved back in with his mother to assist with the upkeep of the home and to help

with the transition from wife of fifty years to widow. His mother is still very active in her church, has a health club membership, and a tight circle of friends she visits and travels with constantly.

As for Lisa, her parents are in their mid-sixties and divorced. Her father has been remarried for over twenty-five years and is retired from management at a major corporation. He and his wife travel the country and while he had a minor heart attack last year, both are still in excellent health. Her mother currently has no health issues, collects social security retirement, and has a small supplemental income. The mother is active at a university and is beginning a second career path. Lisa's mother moved in with her to help with the kids and household duties.

Balance of Life as In-Betweens

All three feel that they have achieved as much of a balance as possible given their circumstances. Because of the children's ages and the active lifestyle of his mother, Karl has achieved a feeling of balance and at this time in his life, feels that it perfectly fine to pursue his life, desires, and dreams. Due to circumstances over the past year, Lisa almost feels in total control of her life and has a good sense of balance due to the flexible work schedule and ability to work from home, along with her mother's assistance in the home. School and extra-curricular activities can be managed and there is even sufficient time for self-care and relaxation. It is Nancy, though, that is having the most difficulty in terms of balance. This couple's careers are demanding and require more than the typical forty-hour work week. The children's extra-curricular activities keep their lives hectic. Add to this, the constant worry over the parents is extremely emotional and leaves a feeling of being pulled in two different directions while still trying to live their own life. The support groups that have been built are extremely important to assisting with the work/family/life balance that is so essential to one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Parental Future Conversations

Conversely, none of the three have had any of the difficult discussions with their parents regarding future life decisions, such as extreme health issues and funeral wishes. Due to the health of her father and her mother's refusal to discuss much at this point, Nancy's attempts to talk about these problems have been shut down by her mother. Nancy is willing to assist with long-term care, but physically cannot due to the distance. However, her mother has seen the need for living wills, last wills, and inheritance issues, and has taken necessary steps with their financial planner and attorney. Even with the passing of his father, Karl has not had these discussions with his mother. The same plans with financial and legal professionals have been handled, but Karl does not know of the interment or living will wishes of his mother, but it is assumed that cremation is the desire. While Lisa has not actively sought discussions, her mother has made it known that there is a living will in place and that cremation is requested. As for Lisa's father, as he and his wife are both still alive, the surviving spouse will handle those issues and does not want any of their children to be involved. After the death of one, the other will discuss at that point.

Because of the circumstances of Nancy's parents, she feels that these important discussions should be had, but her parents are unwilling to talk at this time. Perhaps, her mother will feel like all hope and control will be lost at that point, but it appears that Karl and Lisa do not want to think about the possibility of losing their parents, as these discussions will only serve as reminders that people are mortals and death will be faced one day. It is my desire that the website I create will give avenues for these discussions to take place in safe and healthy environments.

Technology

All three of the In-Between group are highly web-savvy, and technology plays a large role not only in their lives, but also in their careers, using the Internet to bank, shop, book travel, and entertain themselves. Google and Pinterest are regularly consulted. Virtual meetings are second nature, in fact Karl shared that he designed an entire virtual training course, and in the process practically made a television studio. They all have *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* accounts. Nancy and Karl are active on *Twitter* and *Instagram*. Their lives are technology driven, not technology controlled.

Life in the Second Youth

Again, all three see the value and benefits of this website and the information and assistance it can provide. Likewise, color and font does not matter as much to them as overall appearance and user-friendliness. They feel that the most important aspects will be relevance of text and clear labels without creating much confusion. A clean, professional, uncluttered look is more important than extraneous design.

Some suggestions from this group include resources for Americans with Disabilities compliant renovations, especially with retrofitting bathrooms and kitchens. Guidelines for hiring and paying contractors would also be beneficial. The question of private health insurance versus Medicare was suggested as a featured topic. Also, Nancy feels that in dealing with the emotional side, support groups, professionals, and possibly things such as travel or book clubs would also contribute to the emotional and mental well-being of individuals dealing with life-balance concerns.

Outlier

The final interview I conducted was with what I call an outlier, whom I will call Yvette. She is in her sixties and lost her father last year. Her mother is still living. Before the death of her father, her parents downsized and moved to a community or facility comprised of only adults over the age of fifty-five or more commonly known as an active adult community. After Yvette's father's death, Yvette and her mother saw the need in further downsizing and found an excellent long-term facility that her mother loves living in. Also, Yvette is the sole caretaker of her mentally impaired sixty-year-old sister, who lives in a basement apartment in her home. Although Yvette is herself a senior, her family situation also makes Yvette a member of the in-between category. She has obtained her Bachelor, Masters, and Specialist degrees in Education and is a retired educator. Yvette currently runs a small artisan business out of her home and is on the Board of Directors of a local chapter of a national organization that is close to her heart.

She is also very web-savvy like the in-betweens and would feel comfortable navigating the website. She agrees with the others and would prefer a professional look while still being engaging. Yvette has personal as well as business accounts with *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and *LinkedIn*, as well as using *Facetime* to stay connected with out of state siblings and hosts Zoom meetings regularly.

Due to downsizing and relocating her parents, she feels that people would need information on moving companies, donation organizations, high end consignment shops, and estate sale companies. Yvette feels that children no longer want their parent's furniture, etc. but can have no idea of the monetary value of certain items. At the same time, there are mountains of photos that need to be sorted through and either discarded, shared, or converted to digital.

Conclusion

All seven of the individuals I spoke with are highly interested in this venture. They stated that they want to be informed about when the website goes live, and most are willing to contribute to the content in some way. One elicited the promise that this website and blog is going to be created before agreeing to the interview. These reactions speak volumes to the necessity and desire for a place on the Internet where people in whatever stage of life can go to find the answers to the questions that are now being asked.

Competitive Website Research

Introduction

The world has changed so much since 1946, which was the beginning of the Baby Boomer Generation. People are not only living longer than ever before, but they are living more active and healthy lives. Individuals in their eighties and nineties snow and water ski. They hike trails such as the Appalachian Trail, and even skydive. Those who have illnesses such as dementia and Alzheimer's are also living longer, and often-times it is unsafe for these adults to live at home. When adults need care, family members must make difficult decisions. For caregivers, the amount of research required can be the equivalent of a part-time job, but with no salary, no guidance, and ultimately often no answers.

According to the Alzheimer's Organization (alz.org) over five million Americans are victims of this disease and it is the sixth leading cause of death, making it more lethal than breast and prostate cancer combined. There are over 16,000,000 people providing unpaid care to these individuals. Approximately two-thirds of these caregivers are women, of which one-third are the daughters of these patients. Another fact is that the family members who provide the care are the "in-betweeners." So, not only are the children, mostly daughters, taking care of their parents but these children have children under the age of eighteen as well (alz.org).

My search for my mother's issues consisted of looking for answers for in-home assistance or assisted living options. What I uncovered in that time was that in-home assistance was mainly a housekeeper of sorts, or possibly a private Certified Nursing Assistant which would charge between eight and twelve dollars an hour. The other option was an apartment in an assisted living facility, but the monthly rent was usually at least double my mother's house payment. At that time, Mama did not qualify for long-term nursing facilities. Listed below are important

questions, and mostly the questions I was asking myself, along with are so many others that are currently being asked within the families.

- How do I ensure my families inheritance is protected after my death? Is a will enough? What are the implications of probate? Do I need a living will or appoint a power of attorney?
- Will my insurance needs change after I retire? Should I purchase a separate burial policy? Should I cash out a term life policy, or purchase another? Should I increase or decrease my homeowners and auto policies? Should I keep my private health insurance and/or apply for Medicare?
- What are the advantages of selling my home and moving to an active adult community? Should I consider a reverse mortgage? Would it be advantageous to sell my home and rent to keep the upkeep costs and labor down?
- How can I determine exactly what benefits I am due from the Social Security Administration and The Veterans Administration? How do I find out if I am eligible for any extra benefits and if so, how do I apply for these extra benefits? How long will the application process take?

No one wants to spend countless hours online and in person searching for answers to these questions, especially when they are unable to find them. For this reason, my website and blog will not only provide answers to these questions, but also give individuals access to professionals who can give more specific assistance in their field of expertise. Most lay people have no experience with navigating the probate system or exactly which type and how much insurance is actually needed. Unfortunately, government agencies, such as Social Security and the Veterans Administration like to keep their information as close to the vest as

possible. Before an individual can receive the information wanted, they must know exactly which questions to ask.

As part of the planning process, I identified websites that cater to seniors. The keywords for searches I used included “websites for seniors,” “senior living options,” and since I live there, “Paulding County senior websites.” I felt it would be easier to concentrate in this geographical area to begin with, and then branch out as necessary.

In conducting this research, I decided to break it down into two groups: direct competition and in-direct competition to my website. The first thing I wanted to look for was direct competition to the site I want to build. Are there any sites that have different pages for different issues? Do they link to blogs that host experts on the questions that are being asked? Do these websites use links that to other websites can help seniors connect with each other, or help them learn new things and share previous knowledge?

The second criteria I was looking for was the appearance of the websites. What colors were used, and how well did they complement each other? How easy was it to read the text: font, size, clarity? How easy is it for their target audience to use? Is the navigation simple? Each competitor analysis included two parts. First, I analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the website as informational resources. Second, I analyze the website’s design features and usability.

Direct Competitors

1. AARP

Content Analysis

The first website I researched was *American Association of Retired Persons* or *AARP*. In 1947, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus founded the *National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA)* to

ensure that these educators were given a voice in government, that their retirement pensions were safe, and that they could find insurance at a reasonable premium. In 1957, *AARP* was formed to become more of a lobbyist group for the insurance agency and absorbed the *NRTA*, which is still a division of *AARP* to this day. *AARP* is now open to any retired person and as of 2018, *AARP The Magazine* and *AARP Bulletin* are the two largest circulation publications in the country (Wikipedia).

This is the closest to comparable to my envisioned website I could find. The *AARP* website is more fluid and less static than most I have seen while doing this research. The articles are on topics that are relevant to today's seniors, such as finance, health, and nutrition. These give good information about trending topics, but there is no option for asking questions. Of course, right now, a major portion of the website is dedicated to COVID-19, as well as "fluff pieces" that are fun to read but offer no real information. *AARP The Magazine* is a bi-monthly print publication, and the format basically is the same.

Upon entering this website, front and center are posts, articles, and images relating to COVID-19. Since many individuals who are members of *AARP* are also in the high-risk category for contracting COVID-19, it is of the utmost importance that an institution that is so trusted by this sector give timely and accurate information and assistance. The next section speaks to the benefits of membership, including discounts given at retail shops and a shortcut to joining the organization. The next section offers articles on personal safety, financial advice, and scam warnings, along with the customary "fluff" section.

Design Analysis

As for the appearance of the website, *AARP's* corporate colors are a dull red and flat black; their banner is an ugly shade that is not eye-catching at all. The set-up is very plain with only a

few headings. The rest of the landing page is designed like an on-line magazine with thumbnails that can be clicked on to take the reader to the article it is attached to. These are arranged according to subject matter, and there are three to four per section. I did not find the site very interesting, but it is user friendly and easy to navigate. While this site offers advice and relevant information, it still does not offer the services and resources that I want to provide on my site. It offers ads, but no links. It offers advice, but there is no place to ask questions. I couldn't even find a "FAQ" section.

2. *NRTA*

Content Analysis

The *NRTA* was actually the beginning of the *AARP* organization. *The National Retired Teachers Association* (*NRTA*) was ahead of its time in that an independent organization was chartered to ensure a small segment of the citizenry was represented in the state and federal governments (*nrtta*). While it is still active, it has been absorbed into the *AARP Organization* and is not as active as it once was. *NRTA*'s website is dedicated solely to retired teachers, so while the homepage does speak to COVID-19, it is only a small part of the content. A major section is dedicated to webinars and podcasts available for ensuring the safety of pensions, how to contact government officials virtually, and how to avoid COVID-19 scams. The site also contains a "Pension Advocacy Toolkit," along with connections with other organizations. Finally, there are articles on the *NRTA* Programs, including Community Service, Financial Stability, and Leadership.

Design Analysis

Because it is an integral part of the *AARP* website, *NRTA* uses the same colors, fonts, and design. Consistency is a key element in any design, especially in an organization's website;

however, I don't feel that everything has to look exactly alike, and I would have preferred seeing a different color scheme, even possibly a different font. It is my feeling that since they are two organizations within the same parent company, perhaps there should have been something to set them apart. After all, even though they both cater to retiree's, one has a niche on teachers, which should be celebrated. Perhaps the *NRTA* could have used a brighter red, not quite a primary from school days, but something lighter than the dull red of *AARP*.

3. National Institute on Aging

Content Analysis

Part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) is a website that is dedicated solely to the health of the Seniors. This website provides access to articles about heart health, sleep assistance, and of course COVID-19. These three articles play on a loop on the homepage so that with just one click you can read about the issue that is currently highlighted. Below that is a section where one can read about Parkinson's Disease, emotional well-being research, the director's award, and tips for research grant applications. This website also manages another site on *Aging in Place*, which is dedicated to assisting the elderly find options to help them stay at home. In fact, their opening page begins with, as described by the webpage, the often-heard wish of most Seniors, "I want to stay in my own home!" (NIH). This page gives advice and guidance with articles such as "Plan Ahead to Age at Home," and "What Support Can Help Me Age at Home?" While this site offers important information, it is also static in there are no live links within the page and there is very little movement on the page. There are links to other government agencies that deal with housing issues along with Medicare and Eldercare Locators, but there are no other outside links, and there no ways to ask questions.

Design Analysis

Upon opening the webpage for NIH, the first thing I noticed are the three different blues used in the top one-third portion of the site. The banner at the very top is a very dark, primary blue. Even though it is thin, it is still the first thing the eye is drawn to. There is a small white space where the logo, name, and search icons are located. Directly under that is another bright blue ribbon, which houses the list of pages to be found. Even though this isn't the same primary blue and is brighter, it is still a dark blue. Currently, the next banner is a brick red color that is being used for COVID-19 information. Next comes a square which is a third blue, only this one is a darker sky blue. Attached to it is a rectangle where images are loaded on a slow rotating loop. I find the three blues distracting, but more than that, I find the hues of the blues and the red to be harsh to the eye; however, the images are pleasant to look at and their looping speed does not distract. Underneath this there are other visuals and texts that are easier on the eyes.

4. A Place for Mom

Content Analysis

Next, I visited *A Place for Mom*. It is not a direct competitor for my website, but it does have some of the components I am wanting to integrate. This site offers assistance with living options for the elderly (mom). There is a form that requests personal information to be filled out before the site becomes available for navigation. Someone from customer care will then make contact to discuss the situation and provide a list of facilities; however, their options only include long term residential care in which the individual must leave their homes and move into an institution. They also cannot give any advice on senior communities for people over the age of fifty-five or help with decision making of purchase versus renting versus long term facilities.

Design Analysis

The website for *A Place for Mom* is basically one page. Upon opening, there is a picture of Joan Lunden, who is their spokesperson, along with the company's logo and a telephone number. There is a form which requests the client's information that must be filled out before the next page can be accessed. Ultimately, I decided that this would not be a competitor, but rather a possible link from my website.

In the same vein is the site for *Visiting Angels*. This site offers accessibility to in-home care and companionship to the elderly ([visitingangels](http://visitingangels.com)). This site is different from *A Place for Mom* in that this one can be navigated. The landing page uses two tones of bright blue with two banners. The top is white with blue writing and the logo on the left takes about one-third of the space, the other two-thirds has four dropdowns, their phone number, and a search icon. Directly underneath it is the second banner which is the darker shade of blue with white lettering and contains six dropdowns.

As is with most websites of this type now, COVID-19 is a huge part of the landing page. Below that is an "advertisement" for a pre-programmed Alexia that also works kind of like a medical alert system tied directly to the company. The remainder of the landing page is dedicated to thumbnails which are direct links to services offered where details can be found. Again, I could not find anything other than a "FAQ" option, but a reader can enter their zip code to find the closest office. At that point, a phone number will be provided so that in-person contact could be made.

The website itself is very pleasing to the eye and easy to navigate. It is very clean and well organized with large, easy to read font, which (uniquely) is capable of becoming larger. The

color choices are calming as well as easy on the eyes without being harsh. Again, this site is not direct competition for the one I want to build but will be a compliment to the “Navigating Eldercare” page I will add to mine.

Non-Direct Competitors

At this point in my research, I used other phrases to search for sites. I entered the phrase “elderly issues web sites” into the search bar. Of course, there were several links, but mostly there were lists of top five or top ten choices. Other items came up, but of course there was always a different top ten list. Upon looking at that, I found a variety of sites of interest. There were quite a few I think would make great links to my website, such as *Pogo.com* which was a website featuring games that can be played alone or with friends. Teams can be formed over the Internet which leads to making new friends. Then there was a comedy club of sorts named *Suddenly Senior.com*, along with *Seniors Guide to Computers.com* and the travel site *Evergreen Club.com*.

At first, I thought *Retire Wow.com* might be a direct competitor, but it turned out it was just a big ad for health, finance, and spirituality products. And *Seniors Only.com* was a chatroom. *Senior Planet.org* is news and articles geared toward seniors and *Love to Know.com* has thumbnails that take the user to advice on such topics as antiques, hair, saving money, family, and death and dying. While all of these contain interesting content, these are sites that I would recommend on my site and not competitors. The one thing I did notice with all of these is the websites were very plain in their design: white backgrounds with black lettering. Most did not have images to draw interest. The font on most was plain and small, and the sites themselves were not all easily navigated. The topics listed appeared to be generic.

Conclusion

As I wrapped up the secondary research, I discovered many trends in each website. Most of them use blue, red, black, and white, almost to an extreme. The hue choices appeared to be harsh on the eyes, especially the stark white and bold black being chosen. While each site offers excellent information, the sites I saw are almost static with no opportunity for interaction. I came to the realization that there is a need for a website and blog that give seniors, their families, and their caregivers a place where questions can be asked, and information shared. I feel that it is important to provide access to professionals where basic questions can be asked without the initial necessity of making an appointment. This will not provide all information but will give people a place to start. At this stage in our lives, we seniors deserve to use our time to enjoy the things we want to do such as travel and playing with the grandkids, not searching the Internet needlessly. I took on this project and asked the questions to receive the answers that would assist me in developing a website that will enable my targeted audience to enjoy more of their retirement time doing what they want after working so hard during their lifetime.

Nonprofit Research

Introduction

Nonprofits can be excellent resources and have a major impact on the health and wellbeing of members of every community. These organizations provide many valuable services including physical and mental health clinics, free transportation, meals, and human contact and community engagement. Each county in Georgia has their own cluster of facilities that house senior centers and social workers, but there are other organizations as well. While I concentrated on state and local nonprofits, there are many that are federal as well.

Paulding County Senior Center

Until 2020, the Paulding County Senior Center offered different ways for seniors to be active outside of their homes in a safe environment. People could go there daily, for exercise, to eat a meal, and to socialize with others over activities such as bingo games or dances. Now, there are few opportunities for seniors at the facility due to the limited access because of the pandemic. Luncheons and dances are no longer offered, and the travel club has been disbanded, but *AARP* has joined forces with the Paulding County Center to offer tax assistance through the end of April, which can be handled on-line, drop-off service, or in person. The center is open for exercise classes, such as Jazzercise, Zumba, and yoga—even line dancing and art classes are offered on a weekly basis. An individual must register to join the senior center, but the registration form is mainly for emergency and medial contact information. There are no membership fees (Paulding County Senior Center)

Meals on Wheels

This organization works through the Paulding County Senior Center and still delivers meals to home-bound individuals. But there are new restrictions as all deliveries are now non-contact due to COVID. While individuals can still receive meals, they no longer have the opportunity for fellowship. Oftentimes, this is not only the only meal that seniors receive each day, but also the only personal contact with others as well. Applications are required for the Meals on Wheels service, and more often than not, insurance covers the cost (Meals on Wheels).

Paulding County Transportation Services

Non-driving seniors who are not completely house-bound have the opportunity to be transported to shopping areas, doctor appointments, and even jobs through the Paulding County Transportation Services. This free resource is a curb-to-curb-to-curb service, where the riders are picked up outside their homes, dropped off on the curb of their appointments, and then returned back their homes; however, due to insurance liability, the drivers are not allowed to assist passengers inside of their homes or inside of their appointment sites. If needed, assistants can accompany the senior, but this must be arranged by the rider. Appointments are necessary, and registration is required (Paulding County Transit Service).

Paulding Seniors Golf Association

The golf association was started in 1997 with four members who wanted to get together twice a week and fellowship while playing golf. Since then, the club has grown to approximately 300 members. They still golf twice a week at different local courses, but now with a mission—hosting golf tournaments to fund raise for local charities. While not formal a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, they are an engaged community organization. There is a \$10 annual members fee

that pays for printing, supplies, and other expenses for their philanthropic activities. At the beginning of each of the weekly games, each golfer puts \$2 into a kitty, which usually comes to a total of roughly \$8,000 annually. At the end of the year, the collected money is divided among four charities. The chosen organizations have historically supported children and family's needs including Make a Wish Foundation or MUST. In addition, at Thanksgiving, a golf tournament is held to raise additional funding (Paulding Seniors Golf Association).

Conclusion

Since these organizations can be such an important resource for many of my target audience, my website will provide links to their websites as well. Some of the services offered are vital for the health of Seniors, such as Meals on Wheels and the Paulding County Health Center. Links for these will be on the government page. As will be assistance pages for the transit service and senior center. There will also be another page for games and other fun links where the golf association will be provided.

Website Design

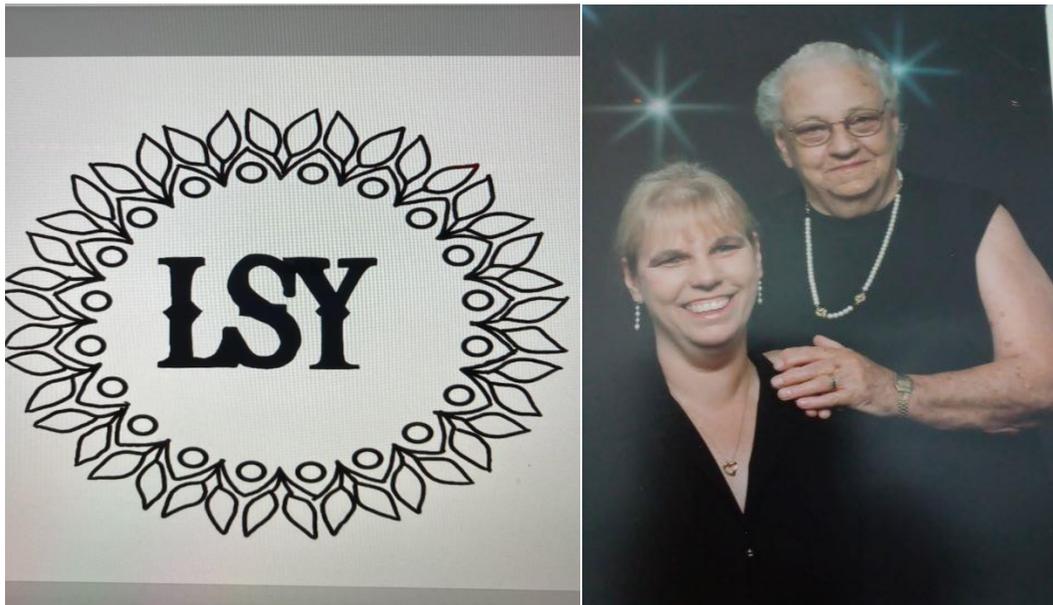
I have been designing this website in my imagination ever since the idea came to me. What I envisioned was a mixture of soft cool and warm colors that would evoke a feeling of peace and wellbeing with just a hint of nature. Each page was to have the smiling face(s) of seniors enjoying their lives along with their families. The text would be large enough to read comfortably while not shouting at the site visitor. The background color for the pages would be muted, rather than stark white or other glaring colors that can be hard on the eyes. The same goes for the font color selection, which would be a soft black or deep gray that would not reflect light harshly. I envisioned the pages neatly organized and easy to navigate, clearly marked so as the content would be expected.

While I am still in the design phase of the website, I have gotten far enough along to know now exactly how I will make it look. There are five tabs that can be selected from on the landing page. The background page is a soft off-white, almost an almond color. The font is still black, but not a heavy one. Currently the border is a dark blue with a design that almost reminds me of psychedelia from the 1960's. I feel that this adds a nostalgic, fun feel without being too intrusive. There is a picture of my mother and myself. This tells exactly who the website is about.

The "About Me" page has a picture of me along with my story of why I wanted to begin this website and giving background information. Next is the "Resources" page. It will be from there that the other pages will be accessed, such as the real estate, legal, and insurance pages. I have added pages there from my original format as well, including topics such as: scams, mental health, moving information, and government links. I do not want these to be listed on the home page because I don't want that page to be too cluttered and confusing to navigate. I would prefer thumbnails from the "Resources" page. The fourth page is entitled "Navigating Eldercare." This

will include links to the varying companies that offer in-home assistance and guides to long-term facilities. The last page listed on the home page will be the “Contact” page. This is where the links to my social media platforms will be housed, along with my e-mail address and future company phone number. There will also be a form that visitors can use to contact me.

Since I am not a web designer, I do need assistance to get these details in place. I don't know how to make thumbnails, and I want everything to be consistent and flow together well. I want it to look welcoming and professional. But, above all else, I want it to look like the person that created this website does care about the information being offered and the clients who take their time to visit the site. My granddaughter created a logo for me, which is prominent across my web presence, along with the photograph of my mother and myself.



<https://wordpress.com/pages/lifeinthesecondyouth.com>

Below is a screen shot of my landing page.



Life in the Second Youth

Navigating the Senior Years

[Home](#) [About](#) [Navigating Eldercare](#) [Contact](#) [Resources](#)

The Journey Begins



FOLLOW BLOG VIA EMAIL

Enter your email address to follow this blog and receive notifications of new posts by email.

Join 1 other follower

Email Address:

FOLLOW

[Life in the Second Youth](#) A WordPress.com Website.

Life in the Second Youth

Navigating the Senior Years

Social Media Analysis

In her book, *Writing for Social Media*, Carrie Marshall describes the genre as, “If the site enables users to create or share content or network with other people, it’s social media” (Marshall). While there are currently five big names in social media, “there are many more, often with little in common other than being used by a community of people” (Marshall). After conducting my interviews, I have discovered that there are three social media platforms used by my targeted audience.

Facebook is most prevalent with seniors. Especially now, this is a fast and easy way to stay connected with members of their “community,” whether it be family, friends, or other social groups. According to Marshall, “Writing is for *Facebook* is a moving target because *Facebook* is constantly changing the way it works” (Marshall). A new version was just introduced, and I am still having a difficult time in finding my way around. It appears to be much easier for those who have a more constant voice on this platform.

The “In-Between” generation prefers *Twitter* and *Instagram*. This group has less free time available and like the fast-paced options these platforms offer. In her book, Marshall states, “Twitter is all about two things: clicks and retweets” (Marshall). One of the most important tools for Twitter is the hashtag; however, it needs to be used sparingly and correctly. If the hashtag is misused too often, the offender will be considered irrelevant, and their platform will lose customers. Instagram is used mainly for sharing visuals, such as pictures or short video posts. While text is allowed, most users do not include descriptions. With shortened attention spans, Instagram can be a valuable platform (Marshall).

In addition to these three platforms, I will also be using LinkedIn as a networking tool and also as a way to add credibility to my website. While personal accounts are used to highlight

resume's, "The profile should not be a cv: it's more of a calling card, detailing your achievements and underlining why your words or videos are worth paying attention to" (Marshall). Using endorsers are a good idea and can assist in building your new network. Creating content should be "done from your personal page and should be written specifically with your LinkedIn network in mind" (Marshall).

I will be keeping all of these tips and tricks in mind as I am building my platforms. According to Marshall, one of the most important elements to consider when setting up a company's social media presences is the persona. This should match the company image with the actual personality with the writer (Marshall). My online persona will match the social media platform I will be writing for while still keeping it in the frame of this website and blog. As an example, my persona with Instagram will be more fun, perhaps highlighting activities offered at an active adult community, while my LinkedIn persona will be more professional and formal.

Capstone Conclusion

After six years of dreaming, planning, designing, and researching, my website will be launch and be ready for site users by September 1, 2021. My mother's legacy will be complete. It was from her that this idea was generated. Because of the hardships she suffered after retirement, and the difficulties we had in procuring the benefits she was entitled to from Social Security, Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services-Senior Services, and The Veterans Administration, it has become my desire to provide a "one stop shop" where seniors, their families, and their caregivers can seek professional advice, share information with each other, and even discover new friends through games and other fellowship opportunities. I think it's fitting that my capstone project will be submitted on May 3, 2021, which would have been my mother's 96th birthday.

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