Aging Well: Poetry Can Help

100th-year birthday poem
I’m losing my hair and my ears and my eyes
That my brain’s also going should be no surprise
My taste’s not as keen as it was in the past
As for climbing mountains, I’ve done my last
I remember our past addresses with ease
But I can’t remember where I put my keys
I shouldn’t complain—I’ve had fun all the way
And managed to reach my 100th birthday
Now that I’m starting on a new page
I hope no one says to me, “Peg, act your age!”

102nd-year birthday poem
Old people bore you with tales from the past
Each time you hear one, you hope it’s the last
But if you consider, the reason is clear
The present is dull and the future looks drear
So if we wander down memory lane
And tell you the same thing again and again
Forgive us, and think that it won’t be too long
Before you are singing the very same song!

Commentary
These poems are written by my distant cousin. She is living independently and looks forward to calls from her family and going out with friends. At 102 years old, Peggy enjoys classy outings to restaurants and birthdays with her friends, and cooks when she can with her extensive collection of cookbooks. She shares stories of living abroad with her husband Homer when he worked as a petroleum engineer in Kuwait; Caracas, Venezuela; and Tripoli, Libya. She can also tell you about meeting Muammar Al Gaddafi with the Petroleum Women’s Club of Tripoli.

A 2010 Gallup poll revealed some positive aspects of aging, including overall perception of well-being, fewer worries (less than those in their 20s), and more supportive relationships. The respondents also reported better coping skills, “positivity bias” in relationships, and improved ability to regulate emotions. Aging, while putting a damper on our physical function and threatening vision and mobility, may still allow for improved well-being, happiness, supportive relationships, humor, and even inspiration for creative writing and poetry.

Janel Kam-Magruder, MD

Resources
National Council on Aging
https://www.ncoa.org/audience/older-adults-caregivers-resources/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Aging
https://www.hhs.gov/aging/index.html