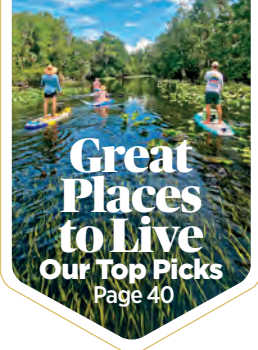


AARP

The Magazine



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ON THE COVER: Sigourney Weaver photographed by John Russo in Los Angeles on September 20, 2025. Wardrobe stylist: Sandra Amador for the Wall Group; prop stylist: Ed Murphy for Consolidated Soup; hairstylist: Richard Marin; makeup artist: Brigitte Reiss-Andersen. Inset: Shutterstock



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In Search of the Perfect Location

The art and science of finding great places to live



WHEN YOU'RE just starting out in life, any old town can turn into home: the place you went to school; the place you launched your career; the place you found love or had kids or just ended up staying. Later on, though, things often get more intentional. As kids leave the nest and retirement starts to seem like a real possibility, questions arise. Where will you feel comfortable as you age? Where will you have access to good medical care, convenient transportation, work if you want it, a friendly and safe community? And where will you be able to afford to live?

Every two years, this magazine seeks to help answer those questions by featuring a few American communities that are particularly good for older people—and by sharing how you can find others. This year's feature, which starts on page 40, puts an emphasis on affordability.

While nowhere is truly cheap these days, we found many great places with a lower-than-average cost of living, combined with a higher-than-average quality of life for those over 50. We're spotlighting eight in our print edition, with expanded coverage and links to lots of helpful resources on our website, aarp.org.

As he has in the past, Executive Editor Jim Lenahan led this year's effort, which began in January. Working with members of AARP's Livable Communities policy group and AARP state offices across the country, his team developed a list of finalists. All of the towns they considered scored high on AARP's Livability Index, which rates U.S. communities on a variety of factors, including housing availability and cost, public transportation system and

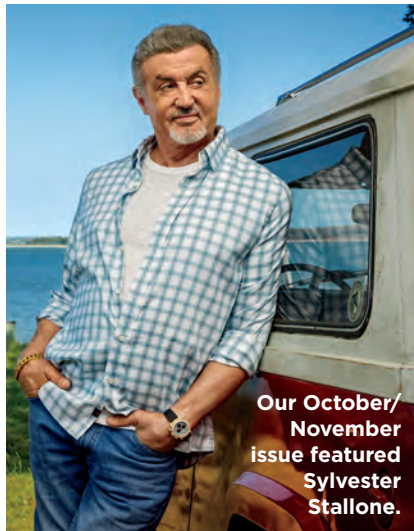
BREAKING AWAY: In this issue, we feature terrific American hometowns for older adults ... and tips on planning multigenerational family vacations.

access to health care. (See how your current home scores at aarp.org/livabilityindex.) Then they put snoops on the ground, hiring local freelance journalists to report on what life is really like for older residents.

"Many of our choices ended up being suburbs or exurbs of large cities, and it's easy to see why," Jim told me. "A well-designed community with a true small-town feel that is part of a big metro area provides the proverbial 'best of both worlds,'" melding an intimate, neighborly experience with access to major medical centers, airports, sports venues and other conveniences. Whether you're already seriously considering a move or only now starting to dream of one, you'll find plenty of inspiration in this feature.

As the magazine's travel editor, Jim was also responsible for putting together "Three Generations, One Harmonious Vacation" (page 56), featuring tips from experienced trip planners on how to orchestrate a big family getaway that all ages will enjoy. Having coordinated vacations for up to four generations myself—with all the preference-checking and schedule-aligning and expense-splitting that entails—I found the story enlightening and full of things I wish I'd known before I started. If you're in the throes of planning such a trip, Godspeed! I hope the article helps you design a wonderful adventure.

Meg



Our October/November issue featured Sylvester Stallone.

STILL PUNCHIN'

“The Sly You Never Knew” revealed a man who has faced tremendous struggles with remarkable strength. I have a newfound respect for his fortitude and intelligence.

MICHELLE PURCELL
Wilmington, North Carolina



I look forward to every issue. I brought the last two issues on a cruise and am enjoying them here on my balcony!

DENISE FISHER
Richmond, Texas

QUICK FIX

I price-shopped for car insurance based on “9 Smart Financial Fixes You Can Tackle in an Hour,” searching for the same limits as my current policy. The best option was \$150 less per month!

CHRYSTINE EMEIGH
Lamoine, Maine

SEEN FROM A TRAIN

Thanks for the scenic train trip suggestions in the October/November issue [“All Aboard!”]. If you’re traveling in the Northeast Corridor, consider any of the frequent Amtrak trains—all already electrified—between Providence and New Haven. They pass coastal scenery that includes salt ponds, beaches, seaside architecture, boats and water views. Best to sit on the south-facing side of the train.

BARRY SCHILLER
North Providence, Rhode Island

CARING CONNECTIONS

I am my son’s lifelong full-time caregiver. I love that Emma Heming Willis [“That Wasn’t the Bruce I Knew”] points out that, in the beginning, it really rocks your world. After time, you develop a routine and learn to balance and find joy in this unexpected path.

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CORRECTION: “There’s Money in That Box of Old Cables” in the October/November issue suggested that *usedcable.com* purchases the items shown. That company buys only specialty audiophile cables.

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64	\$33.50	\$24.55	\$66.00	\$48.10	\$98.50	\$71.65	\$163.50	\$118.75
65	\$34.75	\$25.50	\$68.50	\$50.00	\$102.25	\$74.50	\$169.75	\$123.50
66	\$35.90	\$26.35	\$70.80	\$51.70	\$105.70	\$77.05	\$175.50	\$127.75
67	\$37.05	\$27.25	\$73.10	\$53.50	\$109.15	\$79.75	\$181.25	\$132.25
68	\$38.70	\$28.95	\$76.40	\$56.90	\$114.10	\$84.85	\$189.50	\$140.75
69	\$39.75	\$30.60	\$78.50	\$60.20	\$117.25	\$89.80	\$194.75	\$149.00
70	\$43.85	\$32.45	\$86.70	\$63.90	\$129.55	\$95.35	\$215.25	\$158.25
71	\$45.60	\$34.25	\$90.20	\$67.50	\$134.80	\$100.75	\$224.00	\$167.25
72	\$47.70	\$36.00	\$94.40	\$71.00	\$141.10	\$106.00	\$234.50	\$176.00
73	\$50.90	\$38.95	\$100.80	\$76.90	\$150.70	\$114.85	\$250.50	\$190.75

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Upfront The **A**List

6 Surprising Things About Joan Chen

1 Born in China, she was scouted for her first movie thanks to her rifle skills.

They picked me out of my high school rifle team because the character was a girl fighter, and I was relatively sturdier and darker and resembled a country girl who could fight.

2 She won best actress in China at age 19 for 1979's *The Little Flower*.

That film basically catapulted me into being the star of the era. An entire generation in China, even at my age now, still calls me Little Flower.

3 Coming to America was "like landing on the moon."

It was the most exciting thing that anyone could think of, to go abroad, because we grew up in a very closed society. When I arrived in 1981, I had to start from zero—the language, culture, everything. I didn't even know what an agent was, because in China, jobs were assigned to me.

4 The Oscar-winning film *The Last Emperor* (1987) launched her to stardom in America.

I had made many movies before that but had never experienced the scale of that set. Thousands of People's Liberation Army soldiers had their heads shaved and became extras in-



"People need to make mistakes. Without them, your work is not three-dimensional."

side the Forbidden City, which was closed for our shoot. That had never happened before, nor would it again.

5 Her *Twin Peaks* character was originally written for Isabella Rossellini.

Back then, parts for someone like me were so few. It was my great fortune that David Lynch decided I could be Josie Packard. I was lucky.

6 She visits China several times a year.

My 94-year-old father lives in Shanghai, and I published a book last year and have been doing book tours in China. Right now, the China-U.S. relationship is kind of tense, so it's good to show we are all people who have the same aspirations and dreams for our children and ourselves. —As told to Rebecca Sun

Joan Chen, 64, won AARP Movies for Grownups' best supporting actress award in 2025 for her turn in Didi. Her latest film is Amazon MGM's Christmas comedy *Oh, What Fun*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer.



MEMBERS ONLY
For video of Chen,
visit aarp.org/joanchen
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Keen for White Beans

Mild and creamy, they give a protein lift to casual dinners and holiday spreads. Four chefs share flavorful ideas

By LESLIE QUANDER
WOOLDRIDGE

▣ Polenta Tart with White Bean Spread and Roasted Tomatoes

"This festive and fresh vegan dish is a hit at parties."

—Gena Hamshaw, registered dietitian and author of *A Grain, a Bean*

▣ Puchero

"Originally from Spain, puchero is a hearty stew. The word 'puchero' means stewpot. I like using dried white lima, navy or cannellini beans." —Hank Shaw, author of *Borderlands* and founder of website *Hunter Angler Gardener Cook*

▣ Tuscan White Bean, Sausage and Kale Soup

"The beans, chunks of potato and sausage, plus a splash of cream, make this soup comfort in a bowl!" —Molly Madigan Pisula, founder and chef at website *Vanilla Bean Cuisine*

▣ Lemony Farro Salad with Cannellini Beans, Avocado and Pistachios

"This easy grain salad with a lemon-and-cumin vinaigrette is full of flavor and lots of fresh herbs. It stars foods linked to healthy aging: whole grains, beans, leafy greens, seeds and nuts." —Linda Shiue, physician, chef and author of *Spicebox Kitchen*



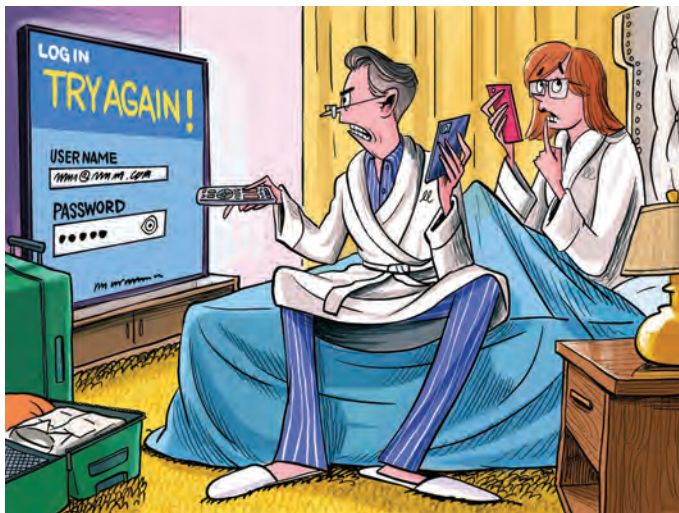
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TV While Traveling

These days, you might need to log in to watch your shows in a hotel room

HOTEL ROOM TVs used to be so easy: Turn on the set, flip through channels, watch. But the rise of streaming services is making in-room entertainment more complicated. To watch what appeals to you, you might need to log in to your own accounts.

- **Remember your passwords.** Viewers often forget them because they are continuously logged in at home. Memorize or write down passwords before you go on your trip.
- **Log in on the TV.** The hotel TV may have built-in apps for streaming services or use a set-top box. Using the remote control, select a service and log in. You might need to use your phone to scan a QR code that comes up on the screen, then verify your account.
- **Log out before checkout.** On checkout day, the TV should reset, wiping clean all account information. “We’re contractually obligated to do that with the Netflixes of the world,” says Scott Hansen, a hospitality operations executive who spent 22 years with Marriott. But it’s still a good idea to log out for peace of mind.



But what if the hotel TV doesn't support the streaming service you want to watch?

There are a couple of other options:

- **Casting.** Some hotel chains have sets that let you wirelessly play what’s on your phone, tablet or laptop on the larger screen. One benefit is that you don’t need to log in on the TV. But getting the cast to work can sometimes be frustrating and may require a little technical know-how.
- **Connecting a laptop to the TV.** To do this, you may need to bring an HDMI cord to plug into the TV. And you may need to change the input on the TV remote and adjust your laptop’s display settings.

—Chris Morris

You Might Never Stop Paying for That New Car

Subscription fees come to vehicles



UNTIL RECENTLY, buying a car meant full ownership: Pay for it, and you own it.

But now many automakers charge subscription fees for extras, such as remote locking through a phone app, hands-free driving or electronic parking assistance. Just one subscription feature at \$20 a month could cost you around \$2,500 for the life of the vehicle.

Brian Moody, executive editor at Kelley Blue Book, says car buyers should take a “technology test drive.”

“How that technology works for you,” he says, will “determine whether you need to spend significant dollars a month.”

—Julie Halpert

IN PURSUIT OF WELLNESS Check out these destinations for rejuvenation



GO WITH THE FLOW

Some of the *hales* (Hawaiian for “houses”) at Sensei Lanai, A Four Seasons Resort, have warm pools for floating water therapy. fourseasons.com/sensei



SUDSY RETREAT

At Chicago’s Piva Beer Spa, luxuriate in a 98-degree beer bath. Enthusiasts say it may nourish skin, add shine to hair and improve sleep. pivabeerspa.com



BUZZY NAPA VALLEY

Screened-in beehives at the Bee Cottage at Carneros Resort and Spa in Napa, California, create relaxing, harmonious vibrations. carnerosresort.com



ARCTIC YOGA

Near Wiseman, Alaska, the Arctic Hive is a unique yoga studio—and a superb spot for viewing the northern lights. artichive.com —Dana Rebmann

Clockwise from top left: Illustration by Zohar Lazar; Getty Images; Courtesy Arctic Hive; Courtesy Carneros Resort and Spa; Courtesy Piva Beer Spa; Courtesy Sensei Lanai; A Four Seasons Resort

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new people. The Social Hostess also assists with details like transfers to and from excursions.

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Signature Go Local Tours invite you to a more hands-on, off-the-beaten-path cultural experience. You can spend a day at a family-owned, generations-old goat farm in the countryside of Andalusia, or discover fishing secrets with the residents of Portofino.

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Northern Explorer is a seven-night cruise from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Whittier, Alaska, aboard *Seven Seas Explorer*®, from May 20-27, 2026, with wildlife sightings, Native Arts, delectable local seafood, glorious natural beauty, and majestic glaciers.

Departing May 24, 2026, Spotlight on Fabergé is a 13-night cruise from Rome to London aboard *Seven Seas Grandeur*®, hosted by Sarah Fabergé, who shares unique insights and curated treasures — all while taking in Renaissance-era cities, charming villages, lush countryside, palaces, and cathedrals across Italy, Monaco, Spain, France, and England.

Seven Seas Grandeur sets sail June 28, 2026 on The Extraordinary North Atlantic cruise, from London, England, to Reykjavik, Iceland, for 14 nights of breathtaking landscapes, walking and distillery tours, renowned local craftsmanship, mountains, coastlines...and puffins.

The 11-night Early Autumn Vibrance cruise aboard *Seven Seas Splendor*® departs September 6 from New York to Montréal for a spectacular showcase of fall colors, plus handicrafts and heritage, whale watching and whiskey, mansions and museums.

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The first ship in a brand-new class, *Seven Seas Prestige*™, sets sail in Winter 2026, beginning a new legacy with one of the highest passenger-to-space ratios in the cruise industry. New accommodation categories include the Skyview Regent Suite at nearly 9,000 square feet of unmatched luxury and amenities.

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Smart Kitchen Swaps

Your cookware may need an upgrade to safer materials



TEFLON AND OTHER nonstick coatings may have once been kitchen saviors, but we're learning more about their downsides. Experts caution against PFAS—"forever chemicals"—that escape into the air or our food when nonstick pans are scratched or used at high heat. There's also concern over plastic microparticles from utensils making their way into our bodies. So it may be time to swap out your cookware. Here's what to do:

CHOOSE NEW POTS AND PANS "Best options include materials that your grandparents used, such as cast iron and stainless steel," says Andrea De Vizcaya Ruiz, professor of environmental and occupational health at the University of California, Irvine. Other good options are ceramic and enameled cast iron. For ceramic-coated cookware, look for products that are PFAS-free, as well as lead- and cadmium-free, and pay attention to wear over time.

BUY HIGH-QUALITY Well-known brands can be more expensive, but the quality of their coatings is better and therefore less likely to leach into food, De Vizcaya Ruiz says.

SWITCH OUT COOKING UTENSILS Unfortunately, your black plastic spatulas and spoons may have to go. Many are made with fire-retardant chemicals, including bromine, which can be toxic. As for their replacements? Stainless steel utensils are safe material-wise, but they can scratch ceramic and nonstick surfaces. Wood and bamboo are better options. Silicone is great for cold applications, such as mixing batter before baking, and its soft material won't scratch other surfaces. But be aware that very high heat for a prolonged period can release chemicals in silicone. —*Jessica Migala*

Water Less in Winter

Indoor plants tend to go on seasonal diets

YOU MIGHT think the dry winter air means you should water indoor plants more. But plants need less water in the winter because there's less light, says Lauren Delorenze, of Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh. Knowing the seasonal differences is important because people tend to overwater plants more than they under-water them, she says.

How to know when to water? Eyeballing the surface doesn't work because soil at the top dries



out quickly. Instead, stick a chopstick deep into the soil. If it comes out clean, it's time to water. But if there's soil sticking to it, check again in a couple of days, says Megan Cain, owner of the Zen Succulent, an online plant store based in Durham, North Carolina. —*Susan Moeller*

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Visit aarp.org/plants for more tips from AARP's Smart Guide to Indoor Plants.



Stay Safe on Dog Walks

A pulling pooch can cause a tumble

TAKING A DOG on a walk can be good exercise, which is especially needed as we age. But a dog that pulls on its leash can put you at risk for a fall.

Terri Bright, a dog trainer and the director of behavior services for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals-Angell Animal Medical Center, offers this tip: Don't start training with a walk.

"The best place to start

teaching a dog to walk on a leash is in the house. I have the dog on my left, and I pivot to the right and give the dog a treat at my left knee. And then I keep pivoting to the right and feeding the dog at my left knee. The dog learns to keep its head at my left knee. Then I start taking steps in various directions, and it stays at my knee.

"The next place to practice is in the yard. And then on the front porch, then somewhere in public where there are no other dogs. It takes a long time before you can walk with your dog without pulling." —*S.M.*



Your Guide to the New Google

AI search results are not always trustworthy

IN JUNE, when people searched Google for the nonemergency police line in Salem, Oregon, the top search result was not the police station but the phone number for the husband of AI researcher Melanie Mitchell. “He was getting all these voicemails saying things like, ‘There’s somebody driving erratically on the highway,’” says Mitchell.

Others have reported similar stories about Google’s AI Overview, which is intended to give web searchers the information they seek in a summary on the results page.

Why does this happen?

Google’s AI pulls information from its search results to create the Overview summary. It may find reliable information from reputable sources—or it may pull misinformation or confuse satire for facts. As in the nonemergency number mix-up, it may even “hallucinate,” piecing together a response that “sounds right, but it’s not correct,” says Chirag Shah, a professor at the University of Washington’s Information School.

In response to AARP questions about AI Overview, a Google representative replied: “At the scale of the web, with billions of queries coming in every day, there are bound to be some oddities, as there are with all search features. When issues arise ... we use those examples to improve our systems.”

What can you do?

Shah suggests treating AI Overview like a prototype: Approach it with caution. “We’re all the guinea pigs here,” he says.

AI Overview is now a core part of Google and can’t be turned off when conducting a search. But you can scroll past it and go right to the web links. Or use a search engine without AI summaries, such as Dogpile or Startpage. —Lexi Pandell



Ask the Tech Guru

I worry a lot about my kids and grandkids when they dash off someplace, and I think they worry about me too. I hear smartphones can let you know they’re OK without your bugging them. Is this true?

Yes. Edward C. Baig, personal tech writer for AARP, says to use one of these:



iPhone Check In

This feature in the Messages app texts designated recipients once you’ve arrived at a location or after a certain time.

Google Safety Check

This feature in the Personal Safety app can text selected contacts to inform them that you are starting an activity and how long it will take. If you don’t check in, they get a notice indicating your location. On some Google Pixel phones, the app is preinstalled. For other Android phones, download it from the Google Play Store.

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Angela Bassett

The actor riffs on old and young fans, her teenage twins—and her good-guy husband

Discover your gifts

During a high school summer program, I entered a talent show, although I didn't really have a talent. But in the library, I had put on an album of Ruby Dee reciting Langston Hughes poems, and it was electric, eye-opening. Her voice! I strung the poems together in a theatrical way for the show, and that was my talent. It kicked off my acting.

Ignore doubters

When I started acting, my auntie asked, "How will you feed yourself? How will you keep the lights on?" But never mind naysayers; if it's for you, go for it.

If you build it ...

After I graduated from drama school and moved to New York, there wasn't much opportunity—some soap operas, two television shows, commercials and only four TV stations. It's more fun now; you get to see the work of so many others, and you can make your own opportunities.

Limitless impact

When *Black Panther* [2018] came out, the 97-year-old church ladies were like, "Ah, that was my movie!" I had little kids running up to me, hugging my leg, and they loved it too. It's amazing that a work of art can touch so many generations and impact individuals across the world.

Good guys

My husband [actor Courtney B. Vance] has many wonderful qualities, but chief among them is that he cares about people. He will listen to you and make sure you are comfortable. He was a very loving son. His mother had ALS, and he took care of her. I hope my



children care for me half as well as he did for her.

Protect yourself

My mother's diabetes and other underlying chronic conditions led to her death, so I prioritize my health and try to get good information out there, particularly on RSV [respiratory syncytial virus]. Every year, 177,000 people are hospitalized because of severe RSV, resulting in about 14,000 deaths. It can affect infants, babies and the elderly—the vulnerable. It's very contagious, and there is no cure, but the solution is simple: prevention.

An older parent

I'm an old mama now [to twins: daughter Bronwyn and son Slater, 19]. It never seemed the perfect time have a kid. I got married and went straight into *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, and then I had all these opportunities. But as a more mature mother, I think I've had a lot more patience. I could see what was happening and be calm, thoughtful and intentional.

Age is irrelevant

I don't allow age to impose limits. Half the time, I forget how old I am! Just keep embracing life and know that the best is yet to come. —As told to Claire MacIntosh and Natasha Stoyloff

Angela Bassett, 67, an Emmy, Golden Globe and honorary Oscar winner, has returned for the ninth season of the ABC series 9-1-1. She has also partnered with GSK for the Sideline RSV campaign to educate older adults and their loved ones about the risks of RSV.



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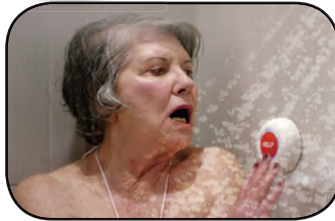
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Healthy You



7 Foods That Fight the Flu

What to eat and drink to build a stronger defense this winter *By HALLIE LEVINE*

AS MANY AS 1.3 million people were hospitalized with influenza during the 2024–25 flu season. This year, be prepared by eating right. “As we get older, our immunity starts to decline, but if we get the right nutrients, we can help our immune systems protect us against infections,” says Samantha Heller, a registered dietitian in New York City.

1 SWEET POTATOES
They’re a great source of beta-carotene, a phytonutrient that supports respiratory and intestinal health and increases immune cells in the body, explains Anna Taylor, lead outpatient clinical dietitian at the Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Human Nutrition. This is important for older adults, since our bodies make fewer immune cells as we age. Taylor suggests roasting sweet pota-

toes with olive oil, oregano and black pepper.

2 BERRIES
They’re rich in vitamin C, which stimulates production of infection-fighting white blood cells, Taylor says. A 2018 review of studies found that eating berries increased levels of disease-fighting cells, such as natural killer cells (a type of white blood cell) and T cells, in older adults.



3 BEANS
Beans are high in zinc, which helps boost your body’s production of white blood cells. “Zinc deficiency has been linked to immune system dysfunction,” Taylor says. She recommends at least half a cup of cooked beans three times a week.

4 NUTS AND SEEDS
They’re rich in vitamin E, which plays a key role in your immune system by supporting the growth of germ-fighting T cells. Walnuts are an especially good choice, as they have more immune-supporting alpha-linolenic acid than any other nut, says Kate Cohen, clinical nutritionist for the lifestyle medicine program at the Hospital for Special Surgery.

5 KEFIR
Compounds in fermented dairy products such as kefir (which is like a thin, drinkable yogurt), have anti-inflammatory properties that can help the immune system fight viral infections. “Fermented

dairy is rich in probiotics, which seem to have a positive effect on the immune system,” explains Libby Mills, a Philadelphia nutritionist and former spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

6 SALMON
It’s one of the few foods that provides vitamin D, which plays a huge role in regulating your immune system, says Jennifer McDaniel, owner of McDaniel Nutrition Therapy in Clayton, Missouri. A 2020 study found people with vitamin D deficiency were almost twice as likely to test positive for COVID-19.

7 GARLIC
It’s rich in a compound called alliin, which may be the source of its immune-boosting power. A 2020 review found that garlic seems to stimulate cells related to immune system function. ■

Hallie Levine is a contributing writer and an award-winning medical and health reporter.

Getty Images (3); Shutterstock (6); Illustration by Peter Arkle

Natural Cures for Jangled Nerves

Proven ways to calm your anxiety, focus your mind and free yourself from dread

By VICTORIA MAIZES, M.D.

ANXIETY IS part of the human experience; it transcends age, gender, socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds and even celebrity. In 1967, while performing a concert in New York's Central Park, Barbra Streisand bungled the lyrics to several of her songs. Her anxiety was so great—what if she forgot the lyrics again?—that she didn't perform in front of an audience for another 27 years!

The good news is that the same brain that creates anxious thoughts can also subdue them. Here's how you can quell your unease.

Get excited.

Harvard Business School researcher Dr. Alison Wood Brooks subjected study participants to a series of stressful tasks and instructed them to say, out loud, either "I am anxious" or "I am excited," or nothing at all. The "excited" participants performed better every time. Just by saying "I am excited," you can transform your anxiety into enthusiasm.



Visit aarp.org/healfaster or scan this code for more about *Heal Faster* and its surprising natural remedies.



Reframe your worries.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches people to change their negative thought patterns to more effectively manage their emotional responses. To get started:

- 1. Identify anxiety-provoking thoughts.** Sometimes we run from anxious thoughts and feelings; recognizing and acknowledging them can make them more manageable.
- 2. Challenge these thoughts.** Ask yourself: Is this anxious thought based on facts or on assumptions? Are there other ways to look at this situation? What would I tell a friend who had this thought?
- 3. Develop more positive thoughts.** For example, instead of thinking, *This project is going to be a disaster*, you might reframe it as *There certainly are challenges, and I am going to plan carefully and ask for support.*
- 4. Practice mindfulness.** Anxiety

is almost always focused on an uncertain future. Mindfulness means paying attention on purpose, in the present moment.

Breathe and hum.

When we're anxious or fearful, our breathing becomes erratic, shallow and fast. If you can't calm your breathing, try to hum, chant or sing. These actions activate the vagus nerve—the long, cranial nerve that extends from your brain stem all the way to your pelvic floor and plays a crucial role in stimulating the part of your brain that controls anxiety.

Consider supplements.

But speak to your doctor first, as many supplements can interact with prescription medications.

B vitamins are vital for the production and regulation of neurotransmitters, which play significant roles

in mood regulation. One study found that people who took 100 milligrams (mg) of vitamin B6 every day for a month reported less anxiety and depression. I recommend the full complement of B vitamins, which is often sold as “B50.”

Omega-3 fatty acids, including EPA and DHA, support brain health and reduce anxiety, but people often do not take a sufficient dose. One meta-analysis found that those taking at least 2,000 mg of EPA and DHA daily saw reduced overall anxiety levels. A dose below 2,000 mg did not achieve this effect. Choose an omega-3 supplement with EPA and DHA in about a 1:1 ratio.

Kava has active ingredients called kavalactones, which can help relieve anxiety, protect neurons from damage and improve sleep. I always have kava tea with me.

Lavender, diffused or inhaled directly, can have immediate calming effects. While most essential oils are not meant to be taken orally, an exception is lavender—in a formulation called Silexan. It has been found in studies to reduce anxiety levels comparable to benzodiazepines. The standard dose is 80 mg daily; it is safe to take up to 160 mg per day.

Inositol is found in small amounts in fruits, beans, grains and nuts, and can be taken as a supplement to treat anxiety and panic attacks. I usually have people begin with 3 grams and slowly increase their dosage to approximately 12 grams.

Magnesium supplements have been found to effectively reduce anxiety. I recommend 400 mg daily of magnesium citrate or glycinate. I also recommend a hot bath with 1 cup of Epsom salts—which is magnesium sulfate—added to the bathwater.

The magnesium from the Epsom salts is absorbed through your skin.

Adaptogens are a unique class of herbal medicines that help

the body adapt to stress. I frequently recommend ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), which helps reduce anxiety, lowers cortisol levels and can improve sleep; the dose is 300 mg twice daily of ashwagandha extract.

Download anxiety-busting apps.

I recommend mind-body apps to virtually every patient I see. There are many to choose from, but I especially like Insight Timer, which has more than 300,000 free guided meditations as well as a paid-subscription option, and Unwinding Anxiety (\$29.99 per month), which was developed by psychiatrist Dr. Jud Brewer.

Get under a weighted blanket.

A meta-analysis found that 63 percent of people using them reported a reduction in anxiety symptoms. Per studies, the ideal blanket weight can be up to 10 percent of your body weight.

Try a vagus nerve stimulating (VNS) device.

Sensate is a palm-sized device you position over your sternum that works by toning the vagus nerve—a master controller of anxiety—and I have found it highly effective for my patients who complain of anxiety. Another VNS device is Alpha-Stim, which clips onto the earlobe. It is available online and at some VA medical centers. GammaCore is a third vagus nerve stimulator that delivers mild electric signals to the neck. It has been FDA-cleared for migraines. Important note: If you have a pacemaker or other implanted device, be sure to check with your primary care doctor before using any of these devices. ■



Excerpt from *Heal Faster* by Victoria Maizes. Copyright © 2026 by AARP. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, NY. Maizes is executive director of the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine and professor of medicine at the University of Arizona.

FRIENDS WITH SIDE BENEFITS

Relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation and breath work can reduce recurrent cardiovascular events by 29 percent and mortality by 34 percent. That's what I like to call the “side benefits” of natural treatments. Throughout my new AARP book, *Heal Faster*, I reveal an array of these unexpected benefits from some of the most common natural remedies. For example:



Turmeric may save your liver.

A turmeric supplement can help ease arthritis discomfort. The side benefits of turmeric may include improvement in nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, GERD and depression.



Flaxseed may enhance cancer treatment. Fresh flaxseed adds fiber and omega-3 fatty acids, but it also contains lignans, which can bind to estrogen receptors and reduce tumor growth.



Pilates can treat chronic pain.

Pilates exercises strengthen your core, including the muscles around your spine. Side benefits: reducing anxiety and depression.



Melatonin and licorice can improve surgical outcomes.

Many people use these to help them fall asleep. But these two supplements can also improve comfort after surgery.

Garlic can stop a cold. Both fresh-pressed garlic and chicken soup have been studied, and they really can boost the immune system's ability to fight infections. —V.M.





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MoneySaver

Safe-Deposit Boxes: Their Secrets Unlocked

Down but not out, these miniature storage units aren't always secure

By NICOLE PAJER AND CLAIRE LEIBOWITZ

They're plentiful ...

Although the numbers have declined, the U.S. is home to more than 20 million safe-deposit boxes, estimates Dave McGuinn, president of Safe Deposit Specialists, a consulting firm in Houston. That's more than 200 for every bank and credit union branch in the country.

... but still can be hard to find

Some major banks, including Chase and Capital One, don't rent safe-deposit boxes to new customers. "If you are looking for a box larger than the standard 3-by-5 one in larger metropolitan markets, there are long waiting lists," says Jerry Pluard, president of Safe Deposit Box Insurance Coverage in Chicago.

Certain documents don't belong

Important papers in a safe-deposit box—for example, medical directives, powers

of attorney and your will—could be inaccessible in a crisis. "If your designated executor or agent needs to access those documents, the bank will deny them access if they are not the person who leased the safe-deposit box," says Jaclyn Roberson, a senior partner at Roberson Duran Law in San Antonio. Store essential documents elsewhere or consider granting a trusted relative or executor joint access.

Boxes aren't 100 percent safe

About 25,000 per year are hit by natural disasters, accidents or theft, estimates Pluard. Flood damage is the most common culprit, but human error often plays a role. In 2014, a New Jersey man alleged he lost \$10 million worth of rare watches and coins after bank employees emptied out his box, confusing it with that of another customer who had failed to pay her rental fees.

Contents aren't FDIC-insured ...

The federal deposit insurance that protects checking and savings accounts is no help if items are stolen, lost or damaged, and banks sharply limit their liability. (The New Jersey watch collector spent eight years fighting for compensation before his bank settled the case.)

... so take precautions

You'll have to insure valuables yourself, perhaps with a rider to a homeowners or renters policy. One advantage: Your insurer may reduce your premium because the items are in a safe-deposit box. Before renting one, says McGuinn, ask whether the bank leaves customers in the safe-deposit vault by themselves. "If they're doing that, don't even think about having a box rented there," he says. ■



Center: Chris O'Riley (Getty Images), 10; Courtesy Costco; Getty Images, 3



Why We Told Our Kids All About Our Money

And why sooner is better than later

By CAMERON HUDDLESTON

WHEN SHOULD you tell your children all about your finances? When should you open up about your accounts, your bills and your estate plans? Is it after an emergency? Is it when you're having trouble managing your paperwork?

I'd say the right time to tell them is now, if you haven't done so already. It's never too early.

Here's what my husband and I did. One Friday night a year ago, we sat down with our two daughters—Zoe, then 18, and Maya, then 20—to go over all the details of our assets, our long-term care plans and our wills.

By sharing all this with children barely out of high school, I'm guessing we are outliers. Although 89 percent of high-net-worth boomers

surveyed by RBC Wealth Management in 2024 said it was important to tell heirs about their inheritances, fewer than 40 percent had done it.

Having such talks can be painful, explains Tim Prosch, author of the AARP book *The Other Talk: A Guide to Talking With Your Adult Children About the Rest of Your Life*. That's especially true, he writes, "when you come to the part about the various stages of your deterioration ... and, of course, that last sentence: The End."

But avoidance can leave your children confused, frustrated and even resentful if they have to handle your finances while flying blind.

→ DEATH AND ALZHEIMER'S

I had strong motivation for not waiting. My dad died at 61 of a heart

attack. That's when I learned he didn't have a will—something that shocked me, since he was an attorney, he was on his second marriage and he had children from his first.

My mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at 65. As she began to decline cognitively, I had to dig through her files, intercept her mail and play detective to get the information I needed to manage her money.

Also, my husband and I had recently updated our estate planning documents, naming our daughters as our alternate executors for our estates, our health care surrogates and our agents under power of attorney. We didn't want to saddle our kids with these responsibilities without explaining what the roles entailed.

Finally, just days before sitting our kids down to talk, I learned that a high school classmate's wife had died in her sleep. She was only 52.

I was 51. My husband was 50.

As I see it, these conversations can't wait until parents reach some arbitrary definition of "old."

Advisers agree. "The conversation

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usually should start when the adult children are in their 20s, because accidents may happen to the parents even though the parents may only be in their 40s or 50s,” says Daniel Lash, a partner at VLP Financial Advisors in Vienna, Virginia.

→ WHAT WE REVEALED

We began by telling our daughters what to do if my husband and I die at the same time, since then they would be our coexecutors. We told them the value of our life insurance policies, the process for collecting death benefits and how much we have in our financial accounts, of which they are beneficiaries.

We said our wills divide everything evenly among them and their brother, Alexander, then 13. (We’ve shared general information with him about our money but not the details we told his sisters.) We also explained how the person designated as Alexander’s guardian would manage the money he inherits.

Then we told our daughters what they would need to know about our finances if we were unable to manage them on our own because of cognitive decline or another health issue. We listed all the monthly bills we pay and all the accounts we have. We told them that we have enough savings to cover the cost of long-term care and that we don’t expect them to provide hands-on care for us.

We explained that as our alternate



health care surrogates and agents under power of attorney, they will be able to make medical and financial decisions for my husband or me if one of us is no longer around to take care of the other.

We showed them where our estate planning documents are located, along with our car titles, house’s deed, passports, marriage certificate and birth certificates.

And we put all this information in writing for Maya and Zoe. Including their questions, our conversation lasted more than two hours.

→ HOW TO DO IT

I have some tips for having The Talk with your children, based on my work managing my mother’s finances and on numerous interviews I’ve conducted, mostly for the book I wrote inspired by that experience.

Consider rehearsing what you plan to tell your children and anticipating what questions they might have, suggests John Cooper, senior private client adviser with Greenwood Capital in Greenwood, South

Carolina. Don’t blindside them; let them know you want to have a family money talk.

If you’re uncomfortable revealing as much as my husband and I did, you could start out small—say, by telling your kids what financial accounts you have without disclosing dollar amounts. “Some information is better than no information,” says Marguerita Cheng, CEO of Blue Ocean Global Wealth in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

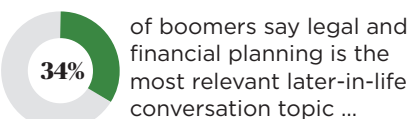
The more information you share, though, the better prepared your children will be in case of your death or an emergency. It would be extremely helpful for you to create a list of your assets, accounts, monthly bills, insurance policies, medical information, locations of estate planning documents and contact information for any financial and legal professionals you work with. You can also use this occasion to talk about the roles you expect your children to play in your care and finances as you age, why you made certain estate planning decisions and what your final wishes are.

Thanks to our professions, my husband and I felt comfortable tackling this on our own: He’s an economics professor, and I’m a financial journalist. Our kids have been subjected to discussions about money for years. But if disclosing all this would be tricky for your family, consider working with a financial or legal professional who can serve as a moderator.

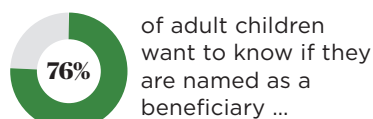
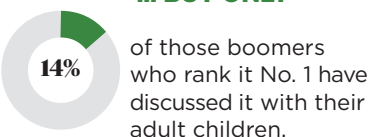
You might discover that family money talks aren’t so difficult. After my family’s talk, I asked my daughters whether our conversation had been depressing. No, they said, the opposite was true. “There’s not going to be a better time for a conversation like this,” Zoe told me. “It makes me happy that you care enough about your lives, and our lives, to do this.” ■

Cameron Huddleston is the author of Mom and Dad, We Need to Talk: How to Have Essential Conversations With Your Parents About Their Finances.

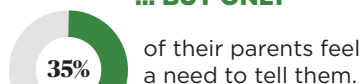
Mind the Gap Financial communication between parents and adult children has room for improvement



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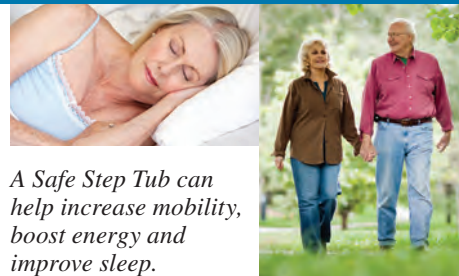


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Source: Fidelity Center for Family Engagement

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Jean Chatzky
TO THE RESCUE

A Crucial Bit of Paperwork

She was owed a monthly pension check, but one important document was missing



THE PROBLEM

When Tonia Yates split from her husband in the late 1990s, their divorce decree stipulated that she was entitled to a portion of the Ford Motor Co. pension benefit that had accrued to him during their 15-year marriage. More than two decades later, Yates, now 66 and a supervisor at a Red Lobster near Cleveland, learned from her children that her ex had retired, so she sent Ford a copy of her divorce decree and asked for her share of his pension. That's when she hit a brick wall. Yates didn't have a QDRO.



Yates sought a piece of her ex's pension.



THE ADVICE

If you're wondering, *What's a QDRO?*, you're not alone. A QDRO (pronounced "quad-row") is a qualified domestic relations order, a legal document that accompanies a divorce decree, like an order for child support. QDROs allow a pension or balance in an employer-sponsored retirement account like a 401(k) to be split without either spouse having to withdraw money, an action that might incur a tax bill and penalties.

Negotiating for a share of retirement funds, as Yates did during her divorce, is incredibly smart, since it can be one of a married couple's most valuable assets. Unfortunately, many people get the paperwork wrong.

A divorce decree requiring a QDRO

should name who has to obtain it (typically the spouse receiving the funds). That person must find a lawyer or specialist to write the QDRO, at a cost of \$500 or more. Next, the court must sign it, the retirement plan administrator has to verify that it complies with plan rules, and both spouses have to sign off on it. Only then can the court approve it. Money in 401(k)s and similar accounts is divided when the plan processes the approved QDRO—an incentive to get it done. But with pensions, payments might not begin for years after the divorce, so people often procrastinate. "It's another expense after an exhaustive process," says financial planner Amy Beardsley Irvine.

So how can you be sure that you will receive your share of your ex's

retirement benefits?

If you're divorcing now: Have the QDRO approved by the court as part of the divorce process. Negotiate for survivor benefits, says Rose Scollard, an attorney with Pro Seniors, a nonprofit that assists older Americans with pension and retirement issues in Ohio. Monthly payments might be smaller than what you'd receive if the payments ceased with your spouse's death, but Scollard believes the trade-off is worth it—especially for women, who are likely to outlive their ex-husbands.

If you're already divorced: Were you awarded a share of pension benefits but no QDRO was completed and approved? You or your lawyer should ask the plan administrator for a summary plan document detailing its specific rules. The nonprofit Pension Rights Center (pensionrights.org) maintains a directory of attorneys experienced in drafting QDROs. Find more resources at nonprofit sites qdrocenter.org and proseniors.org.

In either case, reach out to the plan administrator annually to tell them that you are due a pension payment based on a QDRO. Check that they have a copy of the document and that no payments have started. If there's a problem—sometimes paperwork gets lost when a plan's management changes—go back to the original employer to reconnect the dots.



THE OUTCOME

With the help of Pro Seniors, Yates' QDRO was prepared, and she started receiving pension checks of \$323 a month. "I was a server for 25 or 30 years, making \$2.13 an hour," she says. "You don't accumulate a lot of Social Security that way."

Each check, Yates says, translates to three weeks of groceries: "I don't know what I would do without it." ■

Want Jean Chatzky to write about helping you sort out your financial problem? Email rescue@aarpp.org.

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CATCHING UP WITH RHEA PERLMAN

At 77, she is loving playing a grandmother on Netflix's *Too Much and Being Bossed Around by Her Real Grandkids at Home*.

In the Netflix series, you're the grandmother. How is being a grandma in real life?

We had a big wedding recently. My daughter Lucy, who has the grandson, and her fiancé got married, and we had a celebration. [Perlman and husband Danny DeVito, 81, have three children—daughters Lucy, 42, and Gracie, 40, and son Jake, 38—and two grandchildren.]

How's Danny as a grandpa? What does he like to be called?

He's Pop-Pop. Oh, he loves them. We both spend as much time with them as they allow us to.

Is being a grandmother the best part about getting older?

Yeah. So far, this is the best part. Getting older is not something I love. Getting older, people say, "Oh, you become wiser, I feel better now that I'm this age." I don't get that at all. I liked being young.

When did you know that acting was going to be your career?

I guess the first time was when I was at Hunter College. It was a city school, and there wasn't a major acting program or anything. But I was always in plays. I always would try out for plays because I liked doing it. And then a good friend of mine went to Columbia

film school, and he said, "Look, I'm going to do some movies. You want to be in them?" I said, "Yeah." And then gradually from there, I just started thinking, *This might be something I can do.*

Do you remember who gave you the best advice? What was it?

Somebody once said to me, "Just be yourself. Be yourself." And I went, *I wonder who I am.*

Any regrets?

Oh no, I have no regrets! Every day was perfect. [Pauses to reflect.] I'm sure I do, but you're asking me all the hard questions. Stop asking me hard questions!

—Gayle Jo Carter

👉 Go to aarp.org/quickquestions to find the full interview and more.

NOSTALGIA

OUR GENERATION



Sixty years ago, in December 1965, The Who released their breakout album, *My Generation*, which gave those of us now in our 70s a rallying cry for our teen years. And good news: Despite the title track containing the lyric "Hope I die before I get old," both Roger Daltrey, 81, who sang it, and Pete Townshend, 80, who wrote it, are still with us.

FASHION

Brighten Your Winter Wardrobe

WHILE WEARING black may have flattered your younger self, skin tones change as we age, says Michelle Barrett, founder of the Capsule Closet Stylist. Black can start to look harsh against the complexion. It may be time to introduce a little color into your winter style. Stitch Fix stylist Anne Seghi offers these tips on how to do just that.



1 Go slow. Start with one colorful piece, such as swapping out a black tee for a forest green one or adding a pink sweater to a neutral outfit. Then add more color combinations or playful prints.



2 Accessories can be your gateway to color. Try a cherry-red crossbody bag or a bold teal scarf that can be a bright focal point. Stitch Fix reports seeing a surge in the popularity of accessories.



3 Try feline-friendly prints. Leopard and other animal prints are timeless. In 2025, Stitch Fix saw a 33 percent increase in client requests for leopard prints. Try a leopard belt or flats in an animal print.



4 Choose new neutrals. Men and women alike can opt for rich tones like burgundy, forest green or camel in a winter coat. It breaks the drab outerwear habit and makes an outfit feel current.

—Ann Brenoff

When Aging Isn't in Sync

How do couples navigate growing older at different paces? By MICHAEL DOWNS

NEITHER OF US was good on ice skates, so that distant December night was more festive than fun. Sheri clutched my hand to steady herself, but also because that's what couples do under bright lights, cheeks cold and feet pinched by rental skates.

More recently, I skated again. This time, Sheri stood outside the rink, unwilling to chance her wonky knee.

We anticipated aging out of sync when we married in 1993. After all, she is 17 years older. But for much of our three decades together, we skated together. The past couple of years? Not so much. Sheri's now 78; I'm 61. These days, hikes up hills



more readily take her breath. Her heart drug makes her arms bruise as easily as ripe bananas. We wonder whether she's on the aging elevator, while I'm taking the stairs.

We're not alone. Even like-aged couples can move differently through time. They wonder—as we do—how best to accommodate each other's pace: wait, skip ahead, find new ways to walk in step?

"Reciprocity is central," says Meng Huo, an associate professor at the University of California, Davis, who studies empathy in older adults. She says that being mutually understanding is helpful for couples aging at different paces.

About a year and a half ago, with

Sheri's encouragement, I retired early from my career as a creative writing professor. We decided the years themselves needed to slow. Now we travel more, exercise more, take more time to identify birdsong.

Three or four times over the past couple of years, when we've given ourselves a moment, Sheri has turned to me and spoken a phrase. The words are a kind of charm or spell, a reminder, but also a way of speaking hope into reality.

"These *are* the good old days," she says.

Michael Downs is the author of three books, including, most recently, the novel The Strange and True Tale of Horace Wells, Surgeon Dentist. He lives in Baltimore.

 Excerpted from our new, all-digital extra issue of AARP THE MAGAZINE. Find it at aarp.org/modernlove or scan this code.



From Top: Liam Eisenberg, Getty Images

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The Summer After My Fall

A new sense of vulnerability and the search for the grace to deal with it By CHIP BROWN

UNTIL I missed a step and fell last June, at the end of a vacation in Venice, I am ashamed to say I was mystified to the point of exasperation by the prevalence of falls among older people. I wasn't unsympathetic, just baffled. Who were all these geriatric klutzes, and what was the matter with them that they were toppling over like scythed wheat?

My 96-year-old mother, for instance. Never an exceptional athlete, she called to say she'd had a fall in her apartment. An X-ray at the clinic showed a hip fracture, so she would be going to the hospital for a 40-minute surgery. Four days later, still in the hospital but now with pneumonia, she telephoned her kids to say she'd had enough, was declining antibiotics and removing her oxygen mask. She died that evening.

Or my father, who was an athlete—in his 40s he once won an Irish blackthorn cane for coming in second in a walking race in New York City. He was still playing golf and tennis and croquet when, five years before my mother, he fell—I'm not sure why or how, but before he died he had lost even the ability to stand up.

And my father-in-law too. The injuries from a fall in 2011 culminated in his death a month later.

My relatives are—or were—in good company. None of their stories would surprise gerontologists. Falling turns out to be the leading cause of injury for people over 65. One in 4 older Americans reports they have fallen, and 1 in 10 falls leads to a serious injury. Preventing falls, detecting falls and managing falls is a multibillion-dollar business.

And the reasons we fall as we get older aren't all that esoteric. They range from vision problems and foot pain to vitamin deficiencies, general weakness and balance issues. Uneven steps are also a common culprit.

Not that I was thinking about any of this as I lay on my side, holding my right knee and cursing. I'd gotten up at

12:30 a.m. to unjam a stuck bathroom door that wasn't stuck but just opened out, not in. Gotta love Italy. Having solved that nonproblem, I started back to bed. I skipped flawlessly down the first three steps of the staircase and then abruptly found myself sprawled on the floor, with pain knifing my right knee.

I'm still not sure how it happened, and I had the whole summer and autumn while recuperating to think about it. That night I just knew I couldn't walk, and I was as scared as I'd been in years.

Back in the U.S., I did not think of seeing a doctor until the obligatory male 10-day period of pretending-nothing's-wrong-that-won't-fix-itself passed. I finally got an appointment with an orthopedist who said: You've torn your right quadriceps tendon, you need surgery as soon as possible and a minimum of eight weeks of physical therapy if you don't

want to limp around like Captain Ahab the rest of your life.

So I passed my first summer as an invalid. I no longer look askance at the abundance of geriatric klutzes—my name tops the list.

It is another comeuppance, another of those rude awakenings that press home the mortal reality of life that most of us assiduously turn away from. It is humbling in so many other

ways, not just the physical constraints but the emotional vulnerability, the swallowed pride of acknowledging dependency, of needing to ask for help. Help getting something to eat. Help putting on a sock. Help not being terminally glum that I may not fully recover the mobility I had before and be able to do what I had heedlessly taken for granted. Things that once seemed like chores—bagging the garbage or walking the dog—suddenly look like privileges. It takes but one fall to bring you closer to the truth that sooner or later everything falls. Leaves, trees, lions, fathers, mothers, families, friends—all falling in falls great and small. Hemlines, empires, stars.

I recently came across a Japanese proverb: "Fall seven times, rise eight." That seems a bit extreme—why make a habit of it? As my summer as an invalid ripened into fall, I would say this instead: Fall one time and bless whatever you believe in if you can rise at all.

Chip Brown, 72, is the author of two books and has written for numerous national magazines, including Outside and National Geographic, as well as The New York Times.





MONEY

START 2026 ON THE RIGHT FINANCIAL FOOT

IF YOU made a money-related New Year's resolution, now's the time to put your financial house in order. Melissa Sotudeh, senior wealth adviser at MAI Capital Management, offers these tips:

✓ PLAN FOR FUTURE RMDs. Recent regulatory changes allowing you to wait until age 73 to start taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) provide more time to reduce the balance in your tax-deferred accounts, potentially cutting future RMDs—and the tax bills associated with them. You can do this by making some pre-RMD withdrawals now, cutting the amount you have to take out later.

✓ CONSIDER A "CONVERSION." Another option is to do a Roth conversion with tax-deferred retirement funds. Check with a financial adviser to determine the best approach for you.

✓ BE TAX-EFFICIENT WITH YOUR CHARITABLE GIVING. After age 70½, you can reduce current and future RMDs by using your tax-deferred IRA accounts to make qualified charitable donations (QCDs). In 2025, you and your spouse could donate up to \$108,000 per person directly to an eligible charity (\$115,000 for 2026). You won't get a write-off for the gift, but the tax-free withdrawal counts toward your RMD for the year.

✓ REBALANCE YOUR PORTFOLIO. Review your investments and make adjustments as needed to ensure your strategy aligns with your risk tolerance and goals. —Beth Braverman



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The One and Only Sigourney

To get to the top, the blockbuster star of 'Alien' and 'Avatar' had to overcome shyness and lean into her zany sense of humor. Now 76, Weaver continues to carve her own path—and is finally realizing some long-held dreams

By **Natasha Stoyloff**

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN RUSSO

No one kicks butt on-screen quite like Sigourney Weaver. During her 50-year career, she has fought off killer space creatures in the *Alien* franchise, battled to save great apes in *Gorillas in the Mist* and clawed her way to the top of the ruthless Wall Street food chain in *Working Girl*.

Statuesque, gorgeous and ripped, she's a feminine icon you don't want to mess with.

In person, though, curled up on her dressing room couch in a comfy pair of Uggs, Weaver is striking, of course, but not at all intimidating. Her angular face is softer off camera, and her deep, smoky voice is gentler than you might expect—especially when she's speaking about friends and family. (The day before this interview, she dissolved into

tears while shooting a video tribute for friend and *Avatar* producer Jon Landau, who died from cancer in 2024.) And she's the first person to tell you she's nothing like the formidable Ellen Ripley in *Alien*.

"I'm terribly shy," admits Weaver during a break from shooting promos for the newly released *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, in which she reprises her 2022 *The Way of Water* role as the sensitive and spiritual Kiri. Indeed, beyond Weaver's dressing room door sprawls the cavernous Hollywood soundstage where she shot the film—an otherworldly maze of *Avatar* paraphernalia: sleek motion-capture bodysuits, head-rig cameras and eerie rubber masks stippled with white reflective sensor thingamajigs.

"I think I've been successful playing strong women because I am vulnerable," she continues. "I don't try to

Wardrobe stylist: Sandra Amador for the Wall Group; prop stylist: Ed Murphy for Consolidated Soup; hairstylist: Richard Mann; makeup artist: Brigitte Peiss; Anderson

**Sigourney Weaver,
photographed
for AARP in
Los Angeles on
September 20, 2025**



pretend that I have the answers.”

When you ask how a self-confessed bashful, overly sensitive girl like her ended up a Hollywood star with a five-decade, blockbuster career and four franchises (*Avatar*, *Alien*, *Ghostbusters* and Marvel’s miniseries *The Defenders*), she seems genuinely baffled at the turns her life has taken.

“A working actor is always what I wanted to be,” she says. By “working actor” she means a stage actor, and not necessarily a famous one. “I like it when everyone puts on makeup in front of one cracked mirror, you know?” she says. “Four franchises was never a goal of mine.”

But whatever her protestations about how she got here, one thing slowly becomes clear as we talk and sift her life: Sigourney Weaver may not wear Ellen Ripley’s emotional armor, but beneath her grace and vulnerability lies the quiet tenacity of a warrior.

‘Dear, They Will Eat You Alive!’

Born Susan Weaver in Manhattan—dad was NBC president Sylvester “Pat” Weaver, who created *Your Show of Shows* and the *Today* show, and mom was British actor Elizabeth Inglis (*Hitchcock’s The 39 Steps*)—the future actor had a ringside seat to the postwar entertainment boom.

Her early years were shaped by VIP jaunts to the TV studio (like a giddy on-set visit with Mary Martin as she taped *Peter Pan*) and regular trips to Radio City Music Hall. “I thought everyone’s family lived in show business,” she says with a laugh.

Not only did her parents pass along show business DNA, they also unwittingly trained young Susan for a future as a nomadic actor who drifts from set to set.

“We moved around a lot,” she recalls of life for her and her older brother, Trajan. “But my parents would never tell us we were moving. They would just say, ‘After school, come to this address.’ And we’d walk in and all our furniture would be in this completely different place. It was very destabilizing not to be able to say goodbye to a place where you’d spent a few years. I think they wanted to skip anything that might upset us, so they just pretended it didn’t happen.”

Entering her tweens, Weaver faced her first immovable obstacle: her height. By 12, she had reached 5-foot-11 and all the insecure awkwardness that goes with it. “I was like a big spider moving around, knocking things over,” she has said. “Being that tall made me want to disappear.”

She soon found ways to cope with her ungainly stature. One was by reinventing herself with a new name. (“I felt too tall to have a short name like Susie or Sue,” she has said.) She adopted “Sigourney” from a minor character in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

Another way she learned to navigate life’s ups and downs? Humor. “In my household, the most important talent in the world was to make people laugh,”

WEAVER’S 10 MOST MEMORABLE ROLES

Eight from the screen ...

Alien (1979) Who’s the greatest female action hero of all time? The conversation begins and ends with Weaver’s brains-and-brawn warrant officer, Ellen Ripley, in Ridley Scott’s jack-in-the-box sci-fi chiller. Somehow she’s even better in the 1986 sequel, *Aliens*.



The Year of Living Dangerously

(1982) After

rocketing from obscurity to the A-list, the *Alien* star proved she could smolder as a romantic lead, thanks to this thrilling—and steamy—love story between a savvy British diplomat (Weaver) and an Aussie journalist (Mel Gibson) in 1960s Indonesia.

Ghostbusters (1984) At 34, the actor played a cellist who manages to bewitch Bill Murray’s sarcastic spirit hunter, Dr. Peter Venkman, even after she’s possessed by the ancient

she says, “and I knew I had that capacity—I was funny. I could make my father laugh. He would convulse with laughter, and tears would come out of his eyes.”

Her comic sensibility and new moniker followed her to Stanford, where she majored in English. She once recalled, “I did live in a tree house dressed like an elf.” She was also performing in commedia dell’arte and “doing Shakespeare all over the Bay Area in a covered wagon.”

After college, Weaver enrolled at Yale for drama, though her mother had tried to dissuade her, warning Weaver that she was too sensitive for such a cruel business: “Dear, they will eat you alive!” Professors at Yale were no more encouraging. “They told me I had no talent,” she says matter-of-factly, “and that I’d never get anywhere.”

‘I Was Reckless and Fearless’

Weaver graduated from Yale in ’74 and returned home to New York with a new ferocity and a kind of anti-plan of attack. At auditions, the Yale profs’ put-downs ringing in her ears, “I thought, *I’m never going to get it, so I’m going to go in and do what I want and not care at all what they’re looking for.* I was reckless and fearless.”

It worked. Her first Broadway gig was as an understudy in Somerset Maugham’s *The Constant Wife*, starring screen legend Ingrid Bergman and directed by theater royalty Sir John Gielgud.

From there, she honed her comedic chops and inner goofiness with playwright and fellow Yale pal Christopher Durang, acting in his 1976 sex farce, *Titanic*, and *Das Lusitania*

Songspiel, a “crazy, intellectual joke” cowritten by Weaver, combining the styles of Stephen Sondheim, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.



For an exclusive behind-the-scenes video, visit aarp.org/sigourney or scan this code with your phone.



Sumerian demon Zuul in Ivan Reitman's decade-defining comedy blockbuster.

Gorillas in the Mist (1988) Weaver earned the first of her three Oscar nominations for her poignant and powerful portrayal of real-life primatologist Dian Fossey in Michael Apted's stunning, African-set biopic. She wouldn't have to wait long for her next Academy nod....



Working Girl (1988) Weaver also nabbed a best supporting actress Oscar nomination for her hissable turn in Mike Nichols' feminist workplace comedy, in which she plays Melanie Griffith's stifling, villainous boss.



The Ice Storm (1997) Ang Lee's gimlet-eyed look at the permissive family values of moneyed suburbia in the '70s is a touching and tragic time capsule, with Weaver's bored, boozy, libertine housewife stealing every scene. Key party, anyone?



Avatar (2009) Still the highest-grossing movie ever, James Cameron's sci-fi fantasia reunited him with his *Aliens* star. As the compassionate botanist Dr. Grace Augustine, Weaver gives what could have been a numbing CGI spectacle a human soul.

Master Gardener (2022) At 73, Weaver had earned the right to play an imperious grande dame. Here she portrayed a manipulative Southern dowager who has an affair with the hired help (Joel Edgerton).

... and two from the stage

Das Lusitania Songspiel (1979)

Teaming with Christopher Durang, Weaver starred in this madcap off-Broadway riff on the cabaret-style theater of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.



Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike (2013)

In this Tony award winner for best play, Weaver costarred with David Hyde Pierce in a simmering family drama about a movie star (Weaver) who visits her resentful sisters, accompanied by her latest boy toy. —Chris Nashawaty

But even with a Woody Allen film as her screen debut—a blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment at the end of *Annie Hall*—Weaver says she wasn't looking for fame on the big screen.

It was looking for her, though. Then up-and-coming British director Ridley Scott was searching for an unknown with a commanding presence for his 1979 fantasy-adventure, *Alien*.

A phone call from Warren Beatty, who'd seen Weaver perform off-Broadway, led to a meeting and a screen test. We all know what happened next: *Alien* became a worldwide phenomenon, propelling the 29-year-old Weaver to instant stardom and anointing her as cinema's first true action heroine and a sci-fi icon.

"The writers took a male part and made it into Ripley," she explains, "not because they felt it was a feminist statement but so, they said, 'no one will ever think the girl might end up the survivor.' When they rewrote it as a woman, they didn't make her vulnerable, having little crying jags or any of that. She was just, 'What's next? Put one foot in front of another.'"

And that's how Weaver has approached her career, crafting one of Hollywood's most varied résumés—moving effortlessly between blockbusters, indie dramas, art house experiments and television films, while continuing to do theater along the way.

"I didn't have some overriding plan," she says. "But after doing a big film with all its demands and the waiting around, I'd long to do a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants small film, where you must get everything in one shot. It was like being on a seesaw. I had to do the opposite thing, always."

It was while doing "the opposite thing"—summer stock theater in Williamstown, Massachusetts—that in 1983

Weaver met director Jim Simpson, who would become her husband the following year. "Jim is from Hawaii, one of five kids, and all of them have sunshine, aloha, in them," she says. "He's the least neurotic person I've ever met. He rides over things like waves, whereas I feel things strongly and go, 'Oh, I'm in deep water.'"

She credits Simpson's influence for keeping her grounded as her career soared. With *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Working Girl* (1988) and *Gorillas* (1988)—the latter two earning her Oscar nods for best supporting actress and best actress in the same year (she also got a best actress nom for the second film in the *Alien* franchise, 1986's *Aliens*)—Weaver solidified her status as one of the biggest female stars of the '80s.

Suddenly she wasn't "the person who could sit on the bus and look at other people" anymore, she says.

The gangly girl who'd wanted to disappear was now a film star.



"Jim rides over things like waves, but I feel things strongly—'Oh, I'm in deep water.'"

Weaver, with husband Jim and child Charlotte

Make 'Em Laugh

Her doubting Yale professors must have done a double take—as did her parents, her mother most of all. "She was ambivalent about my success," says Weaver, a hint of regret in her voice. "It was not great for her to give up acting, but in those days, women did that—especially if they were married to someone like my father, who was running a whole world. She was astonished by my success, and it was sometimes very difficult for her."

The actor surprised directors in a different way: by letting loose her outrageous, quirky humor. Auditioning for *Ghostbusters* director Ivan Reitman, (CONTINUED ON PAGE 73)

AND AFFORDABLE! Great Places to Live

2026 EDITION



Autumn view of
Montpelier, Vermont

IT'S NO SECRET THAT THE COST of housing has increased significantly in America. Over the past 20 years, the average sales price of a new home has risen at a rate about 50 percent higher than inflation. So when Americans look at where they might want to live in their later years, affordability is a key factor. We identified eight communities that won't drain your bank account but still offer quality health care and many other benefits that older people value.

HOW THE COMMUNITIES WERE SELECTED

AARP'S LIVABILITY INDEX is calculated from data on housing, transportation, health, environment and more. A Livability Index score of above 50 is considered an appealing community for older people. To this we applied a key filter: housing affordability. Each of these communities has average monthly housing costs below \$1,500. We also consulted with our AARP state offices for input.



WINTERSET, IOWA A Small Town With Big-Screen Fame

IF LITTLE Winterset, Iowa, looks like the setting of a movie, that's because it is. Its historic town square and iconic covered bridges inspired the best-selling novel *The Bridges of Madison County*, later made into a movie starring Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep.

About 30 miles southwest of Des Moines, Winterset may have only 5,366 residents, but it boasts the recently restored Iowa Theater, which shows current and vintage movies, plus the Iowa Quilt Museum and numerous specialty and antique shops.

"People who visit here often say that they love its authenticity. It's a classic Midwestern county seat town," says Marianne Fons, 76, a quilter, writer and community booster who lives in a stylish converted storefront just off the square.

The cost of housing in Winterset is 26 percent below the national average, but residents don't give up amenities for inexpensive living. The Madison County Health Care System includes the Madison County Memorial Hospital and the Health Trust Phy-

sicians Clinic, and it operates under the umbrella of MercyOne, a large network of health care facilities based in Des Moines. Other large medical centers are located in Des Moines, about a 45-minute drive away.

In town, the Winterset Stage offers local theater productions, and both a winery and a cidery have tastings and other events. The town also has a Saturday morning farmers market, or visit the small farms that surround Winterset. They sell vegetables, fruits and flowers; one features alpacas, offering woolen goods for sale.



POPULATION:
5,366
LIVABILITY INDEX SCORE: 68
AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING COST: \$1,100
PERFECT WEATHER DAYS*: 119 per year

Winterset stages numerous festivals each year, including the Covered Bridge Festival and the Madison County Fall Crawl, a small rural businesses event with coffee, cider, wine, beer and a bite to eat.

Spring and autumn are beautiful in Iowa, and summers are relatively comfortable, with July average high temperatures of 85. But in winter, expect several inches of snow per month and brief spells of extreme cold.

Not ready to retire? Unemployment in Madison County is just 3.6 percent, creating a healthy job market. Top industries include finance, insurance, real estate, health care, social services and the wholesale/retail trade. —Veronica Lorson Fowler

GOING OUT GUIDE



← **Sunny day location:** *Winterset City Park. This 76-acre park is on the National Register of Historic Places. It includes a stone tower, limestone shelter houses that are perfect for a picnic, a hedge maze and a covered bridge. Where to take visitors first:* The bridges of Madison County! Six are scattered in and around Winterset. **Weekday evening hangout:** Iowa Theater. Catch a Throwback Thursday vintage film.

*High temperature between 60 and 85 degrees, with less than 1 millimeter of rain. Source: Yahoo News analysis of federal data

TUCSON, ARIZONA Warm Climate, Cool Cost of Living



OUTDOORSY, laid-back and a bit quirky—including a bicycle-and-pedestrian bridge in the shape of a rattlesnake—Tucson, Arizona, combines the culture of a university town and a 4,000-year-old settlement with the beauty of the desert Southwest.

For a sun-soaked community, Tucson is relatively affordable. According to Realtor.com, the median sold home price is \$350,000—quite a bit lower than Phoenix, at \$465,000, and far lower than either San Diego or Los Angeles.

Kate Kaemerle, 70, relocated here after she and her husband retired. "The mortgage on our Tucson house is about half of what it was in Seattle. And we often spot roadrunners in the backyard!" —Edie Jarolim



POPULATION:
541,033
LIVABILITY INDEX SCORE: 54
AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING COST: \$1,100
PERFECT WEATHER DAYS*: 146 per year

GOING OUT GUIDE

Sunny day location: *Patio of Tohono Chul's Garden Bistro, for brunch.*

↓ **Weekday evening hangout:** The Century Room jazz lounge. **Where to take visitors first:** The beautiful Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.



LONGWOOD, FLORIDA

An Alternative to the Battered Coasts

THOUGH IT SITS in the shadow of Orlando, Longwood, Florida, has a distinct identity, boasting a small historic downtown and many mom-and-pop shops and eateries. But as



POPULATION:
17,089

**LIVABILITY INDEX
SCORE: 59**

**AVERAGE
MONTHLY
HOUSING COST:**
\$1,400

**PERFECT
WEATHER DAYS*:**
148 per year

part of a sprawling metro area, it's close to health care centers, sports and entertainment. And best of all: This community of 17,089 in the north Orlando suburbs is far enough inland to avoid bearing the brunt of hurricanes.

And it's a community that welcomes older people. Longwood City Commissioner Tony Boni, 58, four years ago created a nonprofit called Be the Change Today that caters to them. Most Wednesdays, he holds events



GOING OUT GUIDE

↑ Sunny day spot: *Wekiwa Springs State Park. This recreational area covers 7,000 acres and is built around the headwaters of the Wekiwa River.*
Weekday evening hangout: *Wekiva Island. Rent a paddleboard or kayak at this resort, or just relax by the water in an Adirondack chair.* **Where to take visitors first:** *Reiter Park Butterfly Garden. Take a walk among the flowers and monarch butterflies.*

in a meeting room at the Northland Church that include bingo, movies, exercise classes and seminars on such topics as avoiding scams.

One concern about Florida living is the cost of homeowners insurance, but it is less expensive in Longwood and Seminole County (about \$3,400 on average) than the coastal areas—roughly \$6,300 in Broward County, where Fort Lauderdale is located. —Dan Tracy

RICHFIELD, MINNESOTA

Friendly Community Is 'Urban Hometown'



BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS better. That's apparent in the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield, Minnesota, which has turned its compact 6.7-square-mile footprint into its calling card. "We're our own little community between all the big ones," says longtime resident Eileen Mueller, 76. "We don't have any place to grow out, but I love it that way."

Richfield has made the most of its centralized location. The Mall of America is nearby, as are professional sports venues, theaters and other urban amenities. Many are reachable by a rapid-transit bus line.

"We call ourselves the urban

hometown," says Richfield Mayor Mary Supple. "You have the advantage of city life because everything's

close, but there's also neighborliness, where people care about each other."

More than a decade ago, the city launched Sweet Streets, which resulted in new center medians to improve safety at street crossings. Trees planted along roadways shield sidewalks from traffic.

And last year, Richfield voters approved a half-percent local sales tax to help finance upgrades to a park, a nature center and a community center. —Pamela Schmid



POPULATION:
36,809

**LIVABILITY INDEX
SCORE: 64**

**AVERAGE MONTHLY
HOUSING COST:**
\$1,450

**PERFECT WEATHER
DAYS*:** 114 per year



GOING OUT GUIDE

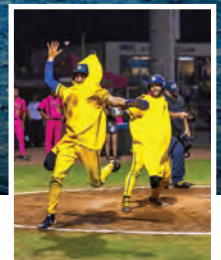
Sunny day spot: *Wood Lake Nature Center. Known as the "marsh in the middle of the city," it has more than 2 miles of crushed limestone trails.* **Weekday evening hangout:** *Sandy's Tavern. This dive bar is a local institution.* **→ Where to take visitors first:** *Veterans Memorial Park. It encompasses Legion Lake and hosts a Saturday farmers market.*





SAVANNAH, GEORGIA
A Coastal Community
Where Warmth Is
Always in the Air

Savannah brims with historic charm. *At right,* comedic sports team the Savannah Bananas



IT'S EASY TO experience the beauty of Savannah, Georgia, just by walking in the green spaces and along the waterways that seem to be around every corner. Or wander through the network of 22 historic squares, crossing streets studded with cobblestones, eventually reaching Forsyth Park, with its Instagram-worthy fountain. Savannah is a welcoming community. The 2024 *Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards* voted it the sixth-friendliest in the U.S. "I moved to Savannah in search of a slower pace and a deeper sense of beauty," says Erica Backus, 50, director of communications

and social inclusion for the Savannah Chamber and Visit Savannah.

The weather is fairly mild through most of the year. "I've always said that the amount of sunshine we get directly impacts folks generally being in a good mood," says Joseph Marinelli, president and CEO of Visit Savannah.



- POPULATION:**
147,583
- LIVABILITY INDEX SCORE:** 55
- AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING COST:**
\$1,250
- PERFECT WEATHER DAYS*:**
167 per year

Despite Savannah's being a coastal city, the cost of living is lower than the national average, according to the Council for Community and Economic Research.

Savannah's Memorial Health hospital is highly rated in many areas by *U.S. News & World Report*. The city has another health system, St. Joseph's/Candler,

and plenty of specialists' offices. "As I spend more time with my aging parents, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the access to care that we enjoy," Backus says. —*Jessica Farthing*

GOING OUT GUIDE -----

Sunny day location: Tybee Island. *There's a beach just 30 minutes from downtown!* **Weekday evening hangout:** River Street. *Walk along the water from Eastern Wharf to the bustling Plant Riverside District, with many shops and restaurants in between.* **Where to take visitors first:** Forsyth Park. *It's beautiful anytime, but go on weekends for the large Forsyth Farmers' Market and brunch at Collins Quarter at Forsyth.*



EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA

Close to Big Cities, but Why Leave?

TO TAKE IN the charms of Easton, Pennsylvania, head to Scott Park, at the confluence of the Delaware and Lehigh rivers, and watch the waters flow while you relax on one of the city's new porch-style swings. "They're the best," says Carmen A.



POPULATION:
28,883

**LIVABILITY
INDEX SCORE: 64**

**AVERAGE
MONTHLY
HOUSING COST:**
\$1,200

**PERFECT
WEATHER DAYS*:**
116 per year

Bell, 70, senior director of healthy aging at United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley. Founded in 1752 and home to nearly 29,000 residents, Easton sits at the foot of the Lehigh Valley. A Crayola factory is just outside town, churning out crayons, while downtown Easton has the Crayola Experience, an interactive museum that opened in 1996. Easton's sweet-spot location has fueled growth; New York City and Philadelphia are each about 70 miles away, making it an ideal option for retirees who want to stay connected to those cities. —*Bill Hangley Jr.*



GOING OUT GUIDE

Sunny day location: *The Karl Stirner Arts Trail. This 1.75-mile route has a sculpture garden.* **Weekday evening hangout:** *The Pomfret Club. Founded in 1885, this dining club hosts game nights, lectures, music and bowling.* **Where to take visitors first:** *The Easton Public Market. This lively spot offers a wide range of food and drink.*



SHERIDAN, WYOMING

Mountain Living, Without Sky-High Prices

FOR FIFTH-GRADE teacher Amy Asbell, 58, living in Sheridan, Wyoming, has trade-offs: She's only minutes from the Red Grade Trail System, one of her favorite running spots in the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. But shopping at her favorite big-box stores, like Costco or Target, means a drive of 260 miles round trip, crossing into Montana.

Asbell and her husband, Shawn, 62, moved to Sheridan last year from pricier Jackson. The couple are already a fixture in the community; they even performed at a story slam at the WYO Theater downtown. "There's such a

strong sense of community here," Asbell says. And for shopping, there's always the Walmart in town.



POPULATION:
18,807

**LIVABILITY INDEX
SCORE: 64**

**AVERAGE
MONTHLY
HOUSING COST:**
\$1,100

**PERFECT
WEATHER DAYS*:**
110 per year

As for climate, the Bighorn Mountains shield Sheridan from Pacific moisture, leaving the town high—elevation just under 3,800 feet—and dry. An average year will see less than 15 inches of precipitation, coming mostly from powdery winter snow and occasional spring storms. Winters get cold, with average high temperatures in the 30s. But most months of the year, nice days will bring multigenerational pickleballers to the outdoor courts at Thorne-Rider Park.

Housing options include colorfully painted Victorians in the well-kept neighborhoods near downtown or country club living around the Powder Horn golf course south of town. The blocks of town houses and Craftsman-style homes around Sheridan College feel suburban.



For health care, Sheridan Memorial Hospital is a modern facility with services including oncology, obstetrics and advanced cardiology care. The hospital is

a vital regional resource and a major employer. —Chris Woolston

GOING OUT GUIDE

Sunny day location: *Soldier Ridge Trail. From here, you can see the entire town beneath you as the mountains fill in the background.*

Weekday evening hangout: *McGregor's Steakhouse. Sit on the outdoor patio and enjoy a 12-ounce New York strip or sip a Highland McGregorita, made with tequila and a house-made sour mix. Where to take visitors first: Kendrick Arboretum. Stroll amid the oaks, elms and maples in the middle of town. Watch for bison and elk in the fenced-in wildlife area next door.*



MEMBERS ONLY
Go to aarp.org/greatplaces2026 for expanded articles and videos about these and other communities.



MONTPELIER, VERMONT

Capital of Culture and Quietude

NESTLED IN THE Green Mountains, with the roiling Winooski River running through it, Montpelier is in many ways what you'd expect in Vermont: It's an outdoor mecca with plenty of splendid hiking and skiing sites. Swimming holes also abound; everyone in town seems to have a personal favorite.

But the bonus, in the nation's smallest state capital (population: around 8,000), is the culture. Montpelier has its own chamber orchestra, an art house cinema (the Savoy Theater) and a happening music club (Hugo's, with a resident black cat). The Montpelier Jazz Project plays a backyard gig, gratis and open to the public, every Tuesday in summer, and there's another free

GOING OUT GUIDE



Sunny day location: *North Branch Nature Center. You'll find 28 acres of meadows and forests along the Winooski River. ↑ Weekday evening hangout: Barr Hill distillery. Sip some gin or rye whiskey, or enjoy a cocktail made with locally sourced honey. Where to take visitors first: Statehouse. This gold-domed, columned structure is a must-see.*

concert—Parkapalooza—on the undulating green lawns of Hubbard Park. The streets of downtown, meanwhile, are easily walkable and filled with inviting and interesting shops.

"We've got a tight-knit community here," says violin teacher Ruth Einstein, 66. "When the town flooded two years ago, many people were out in canoes, helping their neighbors."

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, many newcomers have come to the area to work remotely amid the quietude. Housing prices have ticked up. But Soren Pfeffer, owner of Central Vermont Real Estate, says there are still houses selling for less than \$275,000 in neighboring Barre.

As for health care, the area is well served. The Central Vermont Medical Center, in nearby Berlin, is highly regarded and is part of the University of Vermont Health Network, whose main hospital, in Burlington, is considered the state's best regional hospital by *U.S. News & World Report*. Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center is about an hour away. —Bill Donahue



POPULATION:
8,030

LIVABILITY INDEX SCORE: 68

AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING COST:
\$1,350

PERFECT WEATHER DAYS*:
104 per year

'AGE-FRIENDLY' AMERICA

In September, the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities signed up its 1,000th member: Hudson, New York. Launched in 2012, this initiative helps communities make improvements in housing, transportation, health services and social participation. Some examples of recent innovations include:



Columbus, Ohio: The Senior Services Roundtable connects older residents to local organizations, and has led to programs improving pedestrian safety, increasing disaster preparedness and more.



Pittsburgh: A recent project provides accessible bikes for rent to older residents and people with disabilities. The city has also made traffic improvements to make cycling and walking safer.



Salem, Massachusetts: The Salem Skipper rideshare offers on-demand rides to older residents, students and people with disabilities for \$1. The service has more than 35,000 trips logged. —Claire Leibowitz

Movies for

And the 2026 nominees are ...

BY CHRIS NASHAWATY



Dwayne Johnson in *The Smashing Machine*



Leonardo DiCaprio in *One Battle After Another*

THIS WAS a fantastic year for entertainment by and for people age 50 and up—the people we call “grownups.” Nearly half of the most recent acting Emmys went to older actors, and nine of the 20 nominees for acting at the 2025 Oscars were over 50 too. Here are our nominees for the year’s best film and TV projects featuring older performers and directors. The winners will be honored at the annual Movies for Grownups Awards at the Beverly Wilshire, A Four Seasons Hotel, on January 10, and the ceremony will premiere on *Great Performances* on PBS on Sunday, February 22. Tune in to discover the winners in these and other categories.

Film Nominations

Best Picture

• ***Hamnet*** Shakespeare never goes out of style. But it’s remarkable that 400 years after his death, we’re still finding fresh, compelling angles on the playwright’s life. Academy Award winner Chloé Zhao (*Nomadland*) directs this timeless drama about love and loss, starring Jessie Buckley and Paul Mescal.

• ***A House of Dynamite*** Kathryn Bigelow, 74, the Oscar-winning director of *The Hurt Locker*, returns with this nail-biting war-room thriller about a stray missile that’s been launched at the United States, featuring Idris Elba, 53, and Rebecca Ferguson.



Grownups



Julia Roberts in *After the Hunt*



Michael B. Jordan in *Sinners*

•**One Battle After Another** Director Paul Thomas Anderson, 55, unspools a wonderfully shaggy, dark comedy about an off-the-grid political radical (Leonardo DiCaprio, 51) who comes out of hiding to save his kidnapped daughter.

•**Sinners** Michael B. Jordan does double duty playing twin brothers in the 1930s who return to their Mississippi hometown only to find unexpected evil waiting for them, in director Ryan Coogler's stunning horror tale.

•**Train Dreams** Based on a classic Denis Johnson novella, this soulful,

poignant look at what's left of the American frontier at the dawn of the 20th century stars a never-better Joel Edgerton, 51.

Best Director

•**Paul Thomas Anderson, 55, *One Battle After Another*** The former *Boogie Nights* (1997) wunderkind proves that he has matured into one of our most talented and character-driven filmmakers with this wildly ambitious screwball gem.

•**Kathryn Bigelow, 74, *A House of Dynamite*** The director confirms once

again why she's the master of contemporary political action-thrillers.

•**Scott Cooper, 55, *Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere*** Cooper already showed us that he knows how to spin music into drama, with 2009's *Crazy Heart*, but he outdoes himself with this vivid portrait of the Boss during his darkest hours of self-doubt.

•**Guillermo del Toro, 61, *Frankenstein*** The Mexican maestro of the macabre returns to his horror roots for this gorgeously haunting take on Mary Shelley's gothic classic.

•**Spike Lee, 68, *Highest 2 Lowest***

The *Do the Right Thing* director delivers his best film in years with this fast-paced kidnap thriller (loosely adapted from Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low*) about a New York music



AWARDS SHOW HOST ALAN CUMMING

THE mischief-loving host of the hit reality series *The Traitors*, Cumming, 60, has lent his signature Scottish brogue to performances that have garnered multiple Emmys, an Olivier and a BAFTA. You won't want to miss his playful show-tune send-ups and the other surprises he'll have up his natty sleeve at the Movies for Grownups Awards.

mogul (Denzel Washington, 70) struggling to ... do the right thing.

Best Actor

- **George Clooney, 64, *Jay Kelly*** Clooney reveals the insecurities behind the Tinseltown facade of an aging movie star who travels to Europe to be honored alongside his longtime manager (Adam Sandler).
- **Leonardo DiCaprio, 51, *One Battle After Another*** DiCaprio leans into both the comedy and the pathos of a burned-out political idealist who can't stay on the sidelines any longer when his family is threatened.

- **Joel Edgerton, 51, *Train Dreams*** The Aussie actor delivers a master class in resilience and introspection as a man trying to make sense of a rapidly changing world in this quietly profound character study.

- **Ethan Hawke, 55, *Blue Moon*** Is there anything Hawke can't do? The actor goes deep with a transformative turn as the bitterly jealous Broadway lyricist Lorenz Hart in this richly rewarding biopic about



FOR THE FULL LIST of nominees and to watch Movies for Grownups Awards host Alan Cumming announce them, visit aarp.org/2026/mfgnominees or scan this code with your phone.

ambition, jealousy and the Great White Way.

- **Dwayne Johnson, 53, *The Smashing Machine*** In his most immersive acting feat to date, the former wrestler taps into his past profession to play a mixed martial arts fighter struggling with the challenges of life outside the ring.

Best Actress

- **Laura Dern, 58, *Is This Thing On?*** Let's face it: Dern is pretty fantastic in everything she tackles on-screen. Even so, she practically soars in Bradley Cooper's bittersweet tale about a man (Will Arnett, 55) trying to navigate

a midlife crisis through stand-up comedy.

- **Jodie Foster, 63, *A Private Life*** Not only does the two-time Oscar winner serve up yet another staggering performance here; she does it while speaking French(!) in this twisty thriller about a psychiatrist looking into the mysterious death of one of her patients.

- **Lucy Liu, 57, *Rosemead*** Best known (until now) for her big-screen turn as one of Charlie's Angels, Liu reveals compelling new layers as an ailing mother trying to protect her troubled teenage son.



- **Julia Roberts, 58, *After the Hunt*** Roberts is a long way from America's sweetheart territory in this tricky he said/she said about a college professor forced to take sides when a female student (Ayo Edebiri) claims she was assaulted by one of the professor's closest colleagues (Andrew Garfield).

- **June Squibb, 96, *Eleanor the Great*** All hail June Squibb, who, in her 90s, is proving she's at the top of her acting game, thanks to her deliciously funny and emotionally complex performance in Scarlett Johansson's feature directorial debut about a woman attempting to deal with grief.



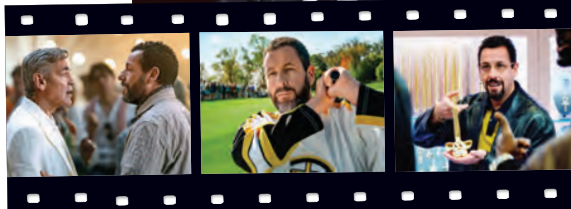
Television Nominations

Best TV Series or Limited Series

- ***Adolescence*** Stephen Graham's Emmy-festooned series about a family being turned upside down when their 13-year-old son is arrested for killing a classmate remains a devastating and nuanced meditation on every parent's worst nightmare.
- ***Hacks*** Jean Smart, 74, keeps her hit

MOVIES FOR GROWNUPS CAREER ACHIEVEMENT WINNER ADAM SANDLER

At 59, Sandler retains his childlike sense of humor. But in the past year alone, our Career Achievement winner has displayed the sort of versatility few actors can claim. He returned to one of his most beloved movie characters in *Happy Gilmore 2* and stretched into more rarefied dramatic air opposite George Clooney in *Jay Kelly*. Many comedians aren't satisfied until they're recognized as "serious" actors. Sandler pulled that off years ago in *Punch-Drunk Love* and *Uncut Gems*, yet he keeps pushing himself harder and further to perform.





Rebecca Ferguson in *A House of Dynamite*



Noah Wyle in *The Pitt*

show fresh by delving even deeper into her stand-up-comic character's intergenerational love-hate relationship with her protégée (Hannah Einbinder).

•**The Pitt** *ER* star Noah Wyle, 54, slipped back into his scrubs and single-handedly revived the small-screen medical procedural, thanks to this tick-tock about the chaos and crises at a Pittsburgh hospital.

•**The Studio**

Seth Rogen's hilariously barbed satire of Hollywood's dream factory juggles inside-baseball jokes, terrific A-list cameos and craven movie studio politics, and turns it all into a bone-dry martini of a series.



•**The White Lotus** When is paradise not paradise? When it springs from the mind of *Lotus* creator Mike White, 55. The latest season (set in Thailand) was one of the year's most buzzworthy watercooler shows for a reason.

Best Actor, Television

•**Walton Goggins, 54, The White Lotus** With his wolfish smirk, tropical-print shirts and self-destructive vendetta, Goggins guided the most recent season of this delirious dark comedy

into a must-watch phenomenon.

•**Stephen Graham, 52, Adolescence**

The British acting veteran has finally become a bona fide star on this side of the Atlantic with this harrowing family drama that examines sin, redemption and an almost biblical level of tragedy.

•**Gary Oldman, 67, Slow Horses** Oldman's performance is a ferocious tour de force in this stunningly matter-of-fact espionage series, which couldn't be further away from the glitz and glamour of James Bond.

•**Pedro Pascal, 50, The Last of Us** Pascal may have been the busiest man in Hollywood this past year, but for our money, his greatest achievement was his turn in this haunting postapocalyptic survival saga.

•**Noah Wyle, 54, The Pitt** The *ER* vet is back in scrubs, which means all hell is about to break loose. His stressed-out physician, Dr. Michael "Robby" Robinavitch, desperately tries to balance compassion and cynicism without losing his carefully composed armor of cool.

Best Actress, Television

•**Kathy Bates, 77, Matlock** In a role that couldn't be more of a bespoke fit, Bates not only gives a hypnotic, whip-smart performance as a crusading lawyer; she makes you forget there was ever another attorney who shared her last name.

•**Kathryn Hahn, 52, The Studio** Hahn

is a master of smarter-than-you sarcasm. And she puts that talent to work (and then some) as a soulless, BS-slinging marketing exec in Seth Rogen's blistering parody of 21st-century Hollywood.

•**Catherine O'Hara, 71, The Studio**

A true ensemble show, *The Studio* carves out at least a half dozen roles that would be the lead on any other series. The scene-stealing Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning O'Hara shines as an exec on the way out who slowly realizes that without power, there isn't much there there.

•**Parker Posey, 57, The White Lotus**



Posey's chewy Southern accent was the subject of countless memes this year. But let's not forget all the other shades she

brought to her pill-popping, diva-like matriarch: She contains multitudes.

•**Jean Smart, 74, Hacks** What's left to say about Smart's career-defining run as Deborah Vance on *Hacks*? No one wears the twin masks of comedy and tragedy better.

Chris Nashawaty, former film critic for Entertainment Weekly, is the author of Caddyshack: The Making of a Hollywood Cinderella Story and a contributor to Esquire, Vanity Fair, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal.

A Fighting Chance



His father, a devoted football fan, was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. So writer **Jamie Metzl** went on offense, exploring every emerging treatment. Here, he shares what he learned about finding the most promising care for someone you love

“YOU HAVE CANCER.”

There are perhaps no three words more frightening than these. Yet nearly 4 in 10 of us will hear them at some point in our lives. When we include relatives and close friends in that mix, the experience of a cancer diagnosis is near universal.

And the next words, inevitably, are: What now?

In April 2025, my beloved father, Kurt Metz, passed away two weeks shy of his 90th birthday after a heroic, nearly three-year battle with stage 4 metastatic neuroendocrine cancer—a rare and deadly cancer of the cells that receive signals from the nervous system and release hormones into the bloodstream.

It was the most painful moment of my life to date. But I was also grateful for the fact that he had survived far longer after his diagnosis than his doctors, and the medical literature, had predicted.

Although we'd been told he had no more than a year of healthy life left, we beat those odds as a result of a remarkable team effort. In those extra years of life, my father celebrated the bat mitzvah of his oldest granddaughter, multiple holidays and two stunning, come-from-behind Super Bowl victories by his cherished Kansas City Chiefs.

But this story is not just about my father. It's about how all people diagnosed with cancer, and their families, can play a crucial role in contributing to the quality of their care and increasing the odds of the best possible outcomes. It's about how, after the horrifying mix of fear, sadness, confusion and even helplessness that accompanies any cancer diagnosis, patients and their families can harness a force that can sometimes be even more impactful than fast-reproducing cancer cells: informed and empowered hope.

Two weeks before his death, I read my dad an early draft of this article, about how other cancer patients and their families might use the lessons we'd learned to extend and enrich their own lives. With tears in his eyes, he told me he'd do anything to help others facing his same long odds after a cancer diagnosis.

This is what he wanted you to know.

Suiting Up for the Fight

At the time of my father's initial diagnosis in September 2022, his scans showed that the cancer was growing quickly: His widely circulating, hormone-releasing cancer cells were primed to spread to multiple organs. More tests still needed to be done, we were told, but probably the best we could hope for would be to temporarily slow the cancer's spread before things got much worse, likely within a year.

I was in shock. I'd always thought my father was indestructible. He was, after all, a survivor.

He and his parents had escaped Nazi Austria in 1938 and then spent a decade as displaced persons in Switzerland

before finally emigrating to the United States in 1948, when my dad was 13. They settled in Kansas City, Missouri, where my father quickly learned English, became a star student and began his lifelong passion for Kansas City sports teams.

After completing medical school just across state lines at the University of Kansas, my father headed to New York City for his pediatrics residency. There he met and wooed a brilliant blond speech pathologist—my future mother, Marilyn—and brought her back to the Paris of the Plains, where my three brothers and I were raised. My dad became a pediatrician, serving the community for more than five decades, and my mother a psychologist. They were community leaders, avid bikers, fearless skiers and, of course, Chiefs season-ticket holders.

After 57 years in Kansas City and more than a year before my father's cancer diagnosis, my parents moved to Denver to be closer to my younger brother's family. That's where my

Advances in technology have been slow to reach many patients.

two other brothers and I rushed when we got the news. Soon after we arrived, my father wept over the prospect of missing his oldest granddaughter's bat mitzvah the following year. He told me emphatically that he wanted to fight for as much time as possible.

Handing him the red-and-gold Chiefs beanie I'd brought for him, I told him that just like Patrick Mahomes rallying his

team in the face of impossible odds, we were going to fight for every minute of possible time.

He put on his new uniform with determination.

How to Get the Care You Deserve

I am a technology and health care futurist who writes books and speaks to hospital boards and medical associations about the future of health care. Based on my work, I knew well that with the remarkable progress in oncology, a cancer diagnosis now means something different than it did just a few years ago. Incredible advances in modern medicine have reduced the overall death rate from cancer in the U.S. by more than a third over the past three decades and led to significant increases in the average amount of time people live after initial cancer diagnoses.

But improvement in cancer care is only one part of the story. While there's been astounding progress in medical research, clinical trials and cutting-edge applications, even the most beneficial new treatments are often unevenly distributed among medical centers and slow to reach patients. The faster our technology advances, the harder it is for all of us to keep up, including health care providers. This creates an essential need for patients and their families to

step up in new ways. Although it may at first seem daunting, and requires a bit of work, the opportunity to gather information and help shape our own care, and that of the people we love, is available to every one of us.

I wanted my father to be treated as if the exciting future of medicine had already arrived. To make that happen, I knew that we needed to play an active role.

After hearing the preliminary diagnosis of cancer from my father's internist, our first step was to learn as much as possible, quickly and accurately, about the particular cancer that we were going to fight. An interventional radiologist performed a biopsy that showed my father had a type of neuroendocrine cancer.

Even with my knowledge of cancer in general, as well as our family's medical background (in addition to my dad, my three brothers are also M.D.s), we knew next to nothing about neuroendocrine cancer at the time of my father's diagnosis. To bridge that gap, I began poring over the many online materials specifically tailored to his cancer, including the website of the Neuroendocrine Tumor Research Foundation, and listening to its superb podcast, *NETwise*, on my daily runs. These types of resources are available, free of charge, to everyone, for a remarkably broad range of cancer types. (Start with one of the resources listed in step 1 of "Your



Dad Kurt with Jamie at the Lake Placid Ironman, 2007

15-Point Cancer Battle Plan," right.)

Recognizing that I needed more help, I reached out to Cancer Commons (cancercommons.org), a resource that brings together critical links and information about a wide range of cancers. Other outstanding resources include the highly informative American Cancer Society, *CancerCare*, Cancer Support Community and OncoLink websites. (I cannot overemphasize the importance of learning everything you can about the exact type of cancer that's threatening you or a loved one, as quickly as possible. The resources are free.)

Cancer Commons also designates, for free, specialists to advise patients and their families remotely. Ours was a caring and knowledgeable woman who had served for decades as an oncology nurse. Like a great football coach, she quickly proved invaluable by helping me better understand the essential steps we needed to consider right away, before we even had an oncologist assigned.

Analyze the Enemy

The first thing I suggested to my father's internist in the earliest days following his diagnosis was that we consider whole genome sequencing (WGS) my dad's cancer cells at

Your 15-Point Cancer Battle Plan

There is only one way to respond to a cancer diagnosis: aggressively and creatively. Some of the most important decisions will be made early on, when patients and their families know the least and feel the most destabilized. Here are 15 important steps I recommend patients and their families take to help optimize their care:

1 Learn a lot, fast.

Most cancer types have nonprofit associations, patient and family groups, and websites.

>Cancercommons.org

(helpme@cancercommons.org) provides free expert advisers to help patients explore their diagnoses and options.



>The Patient

Advocate Foundation

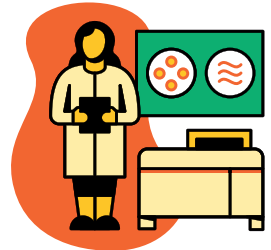
(patientadvocate.org, 800-532-5274) offers case management services and financial aid to Americans with chronic, life-threatening and debilitating illnesses.

>CancerCare.org (800-813-4673) furnishes free counseling, workshops and financial assistance.

Many hospitals and insurance programs provide similar services. In addition, most diseases, even rare cancers, have nonprofit organizations that can help you in your fight. (Try typing your diagnosis and "foundation" into your search bar.)

2 Find a great oncologist, and don't be afraid of younger doctors.

Although experience is extremely valuable, younger oncologists might be more up to date on the latest science. If you have a younger physician, ask them whether they are consulting with colleagues of other backgrounds.



3 Tell your oncologist right away that you're hoping to be as informed and constructive as possible.

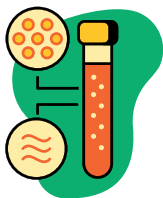
Building trust with and within your care team is essential. Ask your oncologist what steps you can take to make your partnership as successful as possible.

the earliest possible moment. This standard of care, when ordered by a doctor, may be covered by Medicare after a stage 3 or stage 4 diagnosis and ideally should be one of the very first steps after all late-stage cancer diagnoses. (Unfortunately, only a small percentage of cancer patients, including those with late-stage cancers, asks about this sequencing, which can play a critical role in developing a treatment protocol.)

The internist had not planned on ordering this test immediately, because doing so was not the normal standard

4 Ask your doctor right away about having the cancer cells sequenced and grown as cancer organoids.

These processes can often be initiated right away, sometimes even before you have a full diagnosis. While sequencing is becoming more commonplace, growing cancer organoids is considered more experimental.



5 Seek second opinions. Don't be afraid to tell your care team that you are seeking an additional consultation. At its best, oncology is a team sport.

6 Think deeply about your priorities.

Some patients might prioritize quality of life over aggressive treatments; others may choose survival at any cost. Doctors might think about the risks and rewards of various approaches differently than patients and their families.

7 Keep an ongoing list of questions. This is a stressful time, so feeling overwhelmed is natural. Keep jotting down any thoughts that occur to you or questions that arise.

8 Have loving and honest conversations with your family about end-of-life care and make sure you have an up-to-date living will describing your treatment and other preferences.

You can download your state's form on the AARP website: aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/free-printable-advance-directives. Once you fill out the form, you will need to have the document notarized or signed by two witnesses, depending on your state, before sharing it with your care team.



9 Respect the critical expertise of your care team but don't take yourself out of the equation.

Cancer care can be as much of an art as a science. The four most important steps are (1) finding the right and best possible care team, (2) getting the most appropriate diagnostic tests as quickly as possible, (3) determining the range of possible treatments and (4) deciding the order in which the applicable treatments will be administered. Educated patients and families can and should play a constructive role in all these decisions.

10 Learn about ongoing trials that may be relevant for your type of cancer on the U.S. government's clinicaltrials.gov website.



11 Ask your care team about consulting with a nutritionist and a social worker, and make a plan for maintaining the healthiest possible diet and remaining active.

Healthy eating and moving as much as possible can contribute significantly to your well-being. Even breathing exercises, yoga and daily walks can be extremely helpful, both physically and emotionally.

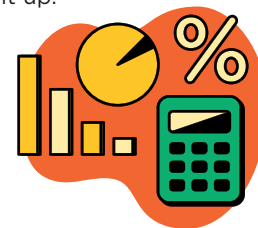
12 Invest in the support communities around you. Cancer can be terrifying and even isolating, but try your best not to feel alone.

Connect with communities of patients and families who have received the same diagnosis; you can find support groups for various cancer types through the websites of the American Cancer Society and other cancer organizations.



13 Set up a home health-monitoring system. There are options for all budgets. They include wearing a device such as an Apple Watch or Oura Ring to monitor your heart rate, temperature, sleep and other vital signs, and checking your oxygen saturation each morning with a simple oximeter. Log these daily figures on your phone or in a notebook. If you see big changes, let your care team know.

14 Don't be intimidated by statistics. Cancer survival rates are averages. They may not give you an accurate picture of your own chances for cure or remission. Hope is your greatest ally, so don't give it up.



15 Embrace your life. Set big and exciting goals for family celebrations or other milestones. Your battle is about gaining time, happiness and meaning. Even after a cancer diagnosis, you're just as alive as anyone else. New and wonderful memories are waiting to be made. Make them. —J.M.

of care for my dad's type of cancer, at least not this early in the medical process. But we knew from the early tests that the cancer was spreading rapidly and that gathering potentially actionable information as early as possible could help our crucial, early-stage decision-making.

A relatively new form of precision medicine, WGS involves extracting and sequencing DNA from a tumor and comparing it with the DNA from the patient's noncancerous cells. Understanding these differences helps doctors look for essential genetic mutations that impact how

cancer cells spread. When there's a match between the mutation and an available treatment, these mutations can potentially be targeted precisely.

After the internist agreed to order the WGS, I asked her to consider prescribing another, more experimental diagnostic tool she had never used before: a patient-derived tumor organoid test. The process involves extracting tumor cells from a patient, growing these cells in a lab and then dividing them into tens or hundreds of batches—essentially, growing miniature versions of the tumor, clusters of cells

that are known as cancer organoids. This allows for multiple drugs and drug combinations to be tested on identical twins of the patient's cancer cells in a lab setting. If a certain treatment kills or shrinks the clusters of cancer cells better than others in the lab, there's a decent chance that treatment may be more effective inside the person.

As with the genome sequencing, the sooner we extracted the cancer cells and sent them in, the sooner we'd have information that could prove important to my dad's care. His pathologist overnighted the collected biopsies to an organoid laboratory in Seattle.

All this happened very quickly in those critical first weeks after my father's initial diagnosis. When we finally had a specialized oncologist assigned to us, I wasn't sure how that person would feel about my having been so involved in my father's care. I secretly feared he might consider me less a member of the team and more like one of those crazy fans streaking across the football field being chased by security guards.

Build a Great Team

It's probably a function of human aging that the older we get, the younger young people start to look. So as a guy in his 50s, I was taken aback when our new oncologist first walked into the examination room. My initial twinge of concern about his youth was completely off the mark: He knew far more about cancer than I ever would, and his wisdom and open-mindedness were the greatest assets we could have hoped for. We quickly began working as a team.

Our oncologist suggested we start treatment with a relatively standard and generally well-tolerated oral chemotherapy. With his blessing, I also sought a second opinion from physicians at Harvard, who concurred.

Never taking off his Chiefs hat during waking hours, even

Sequencing the genes from my dad's cancer cells allowed us to identify potentially effective treatments more quickly.

long after the season had ended, my dad religiously took his daily chemotherapy pills. He tolerated the treatment well; attended, with my mom, nearly all of his granddaughters' soccer games; and was proud to keep all of his once famously red hair. His mood was massively boosted when the Chiefs clinched a shocking Super Bowl victory against the highly favored Philadelphia Eagles in February 2023.

But when we got the results back from his post-chemo scans a few weeks after the game, we were disheartened to learn that the cancer was still growing. Our oncologist recommended as a next step a well-studied and much more aggressive form of intravenous chemotherapy that had about a 30 percent chance of helping but was virtually certain to cause major side effects and knock my father on his rear. I worried that, at his age, he might never get back up and felt desperate to help find a better alternative. It's a common, and difficult, choice that many families face.

That's when we learned just how crucial our sequencing of those early cancer cells had been. The sequence report showed that a specific mutation in my dad's cancer cells—one that was extremely rare in my dad's form of cancer but less rare in some others—was operating as a drill sergeant, instructing those cells to keep growing. Fortunately, a drug already existed for blocking the expression of this mutation. It had been used to treat other cancers but had hardly

The Future of Cancer Care

If a treatment works for enough people, it's usually approved for everyone. That's "generalized medicine"—medicine based on population averages.

But there's a better way to treat malignant tumors: precision medicine, using treatments based on our own individual genomes. The future of precision medicine is coming faster in the field of oncology than most anywhere else. Here are some key developments:

Genome sequencing.

Rather than identifying a cancer based on the tissue where it originated, this approach focuses on the unique molecular identities of a patient's cancer cells. A cancer originating in a person's lungs, for example, might be less like other people's lung cancers in important ways and might respond better to an approach more often used to treat another type of cancer.



CAR T-cell therapy.

In this approach, T cells—a type of white blood cell—are isolated from blood drawn from a patient with cancer. The scientists can then genetically manipulate these isolated T cells to optimize their innate cancer-fighting abilities before reinfusing them back into the patient.



Personalized cancer vaccines.

Cancer vaccines instruct a patient's body to protect itself against cancer cells. A number of different approaches, including mRNA-, DNA- and microbe-based vaccines, can stimulate the body to create an immune response against the cancer. —J.M.

been used to treat my dad's type of cancer.

It was a risk. The medical literature indicated that this drug had been used to treat just 29 patients with multiple tumor types containing the same specific mutation as my father's—including four people with neuroendocrine cancer—and had helped more than a third of those patients. But those odds were similar to what the harsher and more traditional treatment offered. The best we were told to hope for with this new therapy might be a slowing of the cancer's spread—not a remission—but it was likely that my dad would tolerate it better than the chemo. I felt that the potential benefit of this approach outweighed the potential risks, at least in comparison to our alternative. Together, the oncologist and our family weighed the pros and cons of the two different approaches and decided to forgo the rough chemotherapy that the oncologist had initially recommended for this more targeted method.

Celebrate the Wins

My dad needed to take the new pills twice a day for a couple of months before we'd be able to test whether they were working. As the date of the new tests approached, I felt extremely nervous. Had the experimental therapy kept my dad's tumor from growing?

As our oncologist walked us through the new images on his computer, it felt like Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs pulling off another come-from-behind miracle. Not only had the treatment arrested tumor growth, but the new scans showed remarkable remission in all of my dad's organs. We could see the groupings of cancer cells withering as the normal cells and my dad's immune system fought back.

As a result of this progress, not only did he attend the bat mitzvah later that year, but he and my mother together recited a special prayer for their granddaughter at the altar, then danced with our entire family at the party that night.

In February 2024 my brother Jordan and I decided to celebrate our father's amazing progress by flying him to Las Vegas for his first in-person Super Bowl: the Chiefs against the San Francisco 49ers. Jordan collaborates with ESPN on occasion; when he informed them that our Holocaust- and cancer-surviving Chiefs superfan dad was coming to the game, they pulled out all the stops. Entering the penthouse hotel suite they had secured for him, he stopped in his tracks. His bed was covered in Chiefs swag, including a helmet signed by Mahomes himself.

After all that anticipation, we sat nervously in our seats

the next day as the 49ers outplayed the Chiefs, who seemed to be collapsing under the pressure. But my father, proudly sporting his Chiefs hat, refused to give up hope. And just when the game seemed all but lost, Mahomes somehow rallied the team to a last-minute field goal to put the game into heart-thumping overtime. When he later spiraled a perfect pass to Mecole Hardman in the end zone to clinch the win, our two stories of beating impossible odds came together for one glorious moment.



Kurt in his pediatrics office, adorned in Chiefs memorabilia and a stethoscope, in the photo used for his obituary

The End of a Miraculous Season

But even perfect moments cannot last forever. After two years of remarkable remission, my dad's cancer started growing back aggressively in late 2024. We tried new approaches to fight back. Some worked better than others, but the cancer marched on. Searching for more miracles, we fought, yard by yard, day by day, minute by minute, for more health and more time while we cherished the health and time we had.

By early 2025, soon after Mahomes and the Chiefs fell to the Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl LIX, our family huddled around my father as his condition markedly waned. The weekend before my dad died, we gathered in Denver to celebrate his 90th birthday three

weeks early and hold a Passover seder commemorating everything he, our family and all people seeking a better future had achieved in our continual struggle for freedom, opportunity and hope. Less than a week later, he was gone.

My father fought, and lived, and loved life to the very end. The photograph we chose for his obituary showed him at his pediatrics office wearing a Chiefs apron and hat with a stethoscope around his neck and the huge smile that had been the hallmark of his life and medical career.

In addition to his personal and professional legacy, my father left us one more gift: The targeted treatment approach we had pioneered with our oncologist had shown such dramatic results that he published a case report in the *Journal of Gastrointestinal Cancer* recommending that it be considered a new, potential first-line approach for others with my dad's particular cancer. Dad's hope would come true: The legacy of our struggle against his cancer would help others in theirs. ■

Jamie Metzl is a technology and health care futurist and a commissioner of the Lancet Commission on Precision Medicine. He is the author of six books, including Superconvergence: How the Genetics, Biotech, and AI Revolutions Will Transform Our Lives, Work, and World.



Three Generations, One Harmonious Vacation

A guide to planning a family adventure that makes everyone happy—kids, parents and grandparents **By Rachel Walker**

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN SNOOK

COTRILLIA Ewing knows it's time for a big vacation when she gets an online survey. Not from a travel agent or some hotel or airline rewards program. This extensive and detailed query comes from her daughter, Brandi Starr. It goes out to Ewing, 72, and as many as 30-plus others as plans get laid for their next great extended-family adventure.

"Brandi always thinks about the different needs of everyone," says Ewing, of Duluth, Georgia. "What people like to do, their budgets and schedules—she makes it easy for people to say yes, bringing us all together." Starr's survey comes via email or text. Or in the case of the technologically challenged, a phone call. A few sample questions:

- ▶ Where would people like to go?
- ▶ Will they be traveling with other family members?
- ▶ What's their budget, special needs and desired dates?

There's a deadline for feedback—typically two weeks. Recipients who fail to respond can still go on the trip, but they've forfeited the opportunity to express opinions. So far, the surveys have resulted in two multigenerational trips. An upcoming cruise has also been planned, with 19 travelers.

Starr, of Suwanee, Georgia, views all this as a labor of love. "If you look at older generations, they tended to live closer together and naturally had traditions that were passed down," she says. "But with more family living apart, some of those traditions fade, and the bonds that used to be a given—between cousins, grown siblings—aren't always as strong as they could be. Travel brings us together and lets us make memories. It reminds us of what is truly important."

Multigenerational travel—with groups that encompass three or more generations—is more popular than you might realize. A recent survey shows more than 40 percent of grandparents are likely to take such a trip within the next three years.

But just as travel can promote family togetherness and a shared sense of adventure, it can also provoke anxiety and sometimes tension.

To maximize the opportunities and avoid pitfalls, we assembled a panel of experts on this topic to guide you through this potential minefield and leave everyone in your family eager to embark on the next great vacation.

The Experts

- ▶ **BRANDI STARR**, a frequent multigenerational vacation planner and marketing executive
- ▶ **DEEDEE MOORE**, founder of the grandparent advice website More Than Grand
- ▶ **KIRSTEN MAXWELL**, founder of the popular blog Kids Are a Trip
- ▶ **EVITA ROBINSON**, founder of Nomadness Travel Tribe, a community for travelers of color
- ▶ **ROB TAYLOR**, founder of the LGBTQ family travel site 2TravelDads
- ▶ **GAYA VINAY**, independent travel adviser with Fora Travel

Getting Started: Don't Assume Anything

STARR: I've learned to start trips with an online survey, and I always learn something I wouldn't have thought to ask—like when a relative mentioned she couldn't fly for medical reasons. Once the surveys are in, I download everything into a spreadsheet and figure out the destination, costs and logistics. I have a clear visual of what people want to do, what they can afford to do and when they can do it.

TAYLOR: It's tempting to let the natural planner in the family run with everything, but involve others, particularly kids. Ask up front what people actually want—how much downtime, what pace they prefer, what they're excited about. Energy levels and interests change, especially as people get older. Don't assume you know what people want to do.

VINAY: With every client, I have a detailed intake process that's an in-depth conversation where we discuss all the obvious questions about



KIRSTEN MAXWELL, AGE 52

FOUNDER OF KIDS ARE A TRIP

We went to Lake Tahoe in California. Our group included my husband, our three kids, my sister and her husband, their two kids and our parents.

What was your favorite part of the trip?

Every morning we would go on walks

together, and in the evening, we hung out and had dinner on the patio. We could just be together and talk about our lives.

What was particularly challenging?

Cleaning up. Everyone's version of cleanliness was different, and we had two 20-year-olds

and older teens. My mom and dad were telling the kids to pick up after themselves. I tried to encourage everyone to be more mindful, but there were a lot of eye rolls—on all sides!

What's the one activity that everyone agreed on?

We went rafting down the Truckee River. We divided up, so the kids were in one raft and the adults had another. We were racing and splashing and chasing one another. It was a blast.

What's the one meal that became emblematic of the trip?

The kids found a Mexican restaurant called Las Panchitas that we all fell in love with. We went there three times. It was such good food.

where they want to go and what they want to do. But then I have a few questions that are very revealing:

- ▶ What are the goals of the trip?
- ▶ What would make this vacation completely memorable?
- ▶ What would ruin this vacation for you? (People always have a lot of answers for this one!)

THE TAKEAWAY: A questionnaire gives everyone a voice and helps prevent squabbles or hurt feelings later.

Make the Trip a Milestone

ROBINSON: Early on, I'll ask, What's worth celebrating in your life right now? It doesn't have to be huge. Maybe someone just graduated or started a business. Maybe a big birthday is coming up or someone had a baby. We don't always know what's happening in our relatives' lives, and a multi-gen trip is the perfect moment to share it. It's also a time to honor the past and remember the folks we've lost.

THE TAKEAWAY: Celebrating loved ones transforms a trip into something deeper than a vacation.

Pick the Place That Fits, Not Just Wows

TAYLOR: The best destination has to work for everyone's pace. You want a mix of high-energy options, like theme parks or the outdoors, balanced with calmer activities that appeal to grandparents or younger kids. For me, the



Beds, Space and Sanity: Get the Right Accommodations

Florida Keys or Orlando is a multigenerational favorite. You can do them on a shoestring or as a splurge, spend time at a theme park or at a nature preserve.

STARR: With a cruise, you have different categories of rooms, so people who want to travel on a budget may do so, and the ones who want something fancier also have options. With food and drinks already included, there's no worrying about who's cooking or splitting restaurant bills. And there's plenty of flexibility. You can do an excursion together one day and go your own way the next. It's a shared trip but with options.

THE TAKEAWAY: The best destination isn't the flashiest—it's the one that offers flexibility and meets everyone's needs, from toddlers all the way up to grandparents.

MOORE: Often the big rental house looks like the smartest and best choice. Dinners under one roof are great! But when you put three or four generations together, you're also signing up for less privacy and more noise. A baby crying at 5 a.m. or late-night cocktails in the living room can ripple through the whole house. Think carefully about how much togetherness your family really wants.

MAXWELL: Be thoughtful and considerate about divvying up bedrooms. Don't stick late sleepers near the heart of the action like the kitchen or living room, where people will be gathering. I look for rentals with multiple levels so each family has its own floor—built-

TRAVEL TALES



BRANDI STARR, 47

I recently took my mom, 72, my 10-year-old son and my mom's best friend on a seven-day cruise in the Caribbean.

What was your favorite part of the trip?

When we were on Grand Cayman, we decided to rent a Jeep instead of doing the cruise ship excursion. Nothing specific

happened, but before the trip, my mother had surgery. To have come out on the other side of that and be on our own, being silly and laughing, added up to something really meaningful.

What was particularly challenging?

Navigating my mom's wheelchair was more challenging than I expected. We went to a bee sanctuary not knowing that

the whole path was made of rocks, and my mom couldn't do the tour.

What's the one activity that everyone agreed on?

In Mexico, we went to Pueblo del Maíz in Cozumel and learned about the Maya culture. We watched a traditional Mayan dance, learned about the cacao bean and chocolate, and made tortillas. There were aspects of the tour that spoke to each of us.

Courtesy Brandi Starr

in privacy makes a huge difference. **VINAY:** Sometimes a hotel or resort is the smarter choice. More often than not, they're ADA-accessible. And hotels solve common group-travel headaches: connecting suites for families, pools and game rooms for kids, daily house-keeping and no chores to divvy up. **THE TAKEAWAY:** Where you stay matters as much as the destination. Choose accommodations that provide space to be both together and apart.

Shared Adventures, but Separate Cars

MOORE: Renting a van or bus might seem like a good idea because it can save money and feels more efficient. But if you've got little ones in car seats, kids who need naps or just folks with different agendas, that big van removes a lot of freedom. **THE TAKEAWAY:** For the most flexibility, make sure you have enough sets of wheels.

Pass the Baton: Let a Pro Work the Details

STARR: I want us all to still like one another when we finally are on vacation, so after I've wrangled my survey spreadsheet and figured out where we're going and the main logistics, I hand things over to my travel specialist. At that point, I've done the hard work of shaping the trip, and she's the one who turns it into a polished plan with rooms, excursions and all the little details. My family books directly through her, so I can focus on the fun part of planning without carrying the whole weight myself.

Some questions to ask when looking for a travel agent: Do they have testimonials? Sample itineraries from past clients who went to that destination? How do they handle payments? Does the money ever hit the agent's account? This one is a huge red flag. Reputable agents use tech where the money is in

holding and they can't touch it. **VINAY:** Families often try to do too much. One activity a day is plenty. People need downtime to just hang out or do their own thing. A good travel specialist can help balance the plan. **THE TAKEAWAY:** Shape the big picture, then let a travel specialist handle the bookings, payments and itinerary details.

The Price of Harmony: Talk Budgets Before You Travel

MOORE: Have the money talks (there will be more than one) right at the start, even if it's awkward. Spell out the costs, what each person can afford, and who's paying for what. If the grandparents offer to pay, don't see it as them buying influence. It's a gift, and the real payoff is time together.

ROBINSON: Give yourself a lot of time—ideally a year—to plan so relatives

on tighter budgets can save. And if the first plan feels out of reach, adjust. Pick a place where everyone who wants to be there can come, regardless of finances.

THE TAKEAWAY: Be up front about money and open to adjustments—and plan early.

Allow for Alone Time: Breaks Build Bonds

TAYLOR: If you're crammed into every meal and activity, the little quirks and differences will start to grate. But when people have space to decompress, you come back together with a lightness. The goal isn't to spend every minute as one group. It's to make the experience good enough that everyone wants to do it again!

THE TAKEAWAY: Taking breaks from the group isn't a sign of something wrong—it keeps the traditions alive. ■

Rachel Walker has written about travel for Outside, The Washington Post, AARP and other publications.



ROB TAYLOR, 43

FOUNDER OF 2TRAVELDADS

My husband Chris' parents flew to Florida to visit us, and then the six of us—Chris, his parents, our two kids and I—went to Key West. We rented side-by-side condos at the Coconut Beach Resort.

What was your favorite part of the trip?

The beach access was incredible, but it was being out on the water with all of us together that was my favorite.

We spent one day on a chartered boat. It's actually cheaper to charter a boat for a group our size than to do a commercial tour, and everyone was happy. The kids snorkeled and swam. Grandma sat in the shade on the boat and visited with everyone. Grandpa fished. Chris and I were elated to be in a beautiful place with the people we love.

What was particularly challenging?

My immediate family is acclimated to the Florida heat and humidity, but my in-laws were not. Seeing them crash because of the intense weather was tough.

What's the one activity that everyone agreed on instantly?

We all loved the boat charter. It had everything: shade, fun, sight-seeing, wildlife, fishing, swimming.

What's the one meal that became emblematic of the trip?

Even though fried fish and key lime pie are the food you'll find in the Keys—and I love them—grilling out on our vacation rental patio was my favorite meal. Just being together and preparing simple, delicious food was the best.



TOP 7 MEMBER BENEFITS FOR — WINTER —

AARP is here to champion your interests, empower communities and help you thrive with exciting benefits to make your winter more fun and affordable.

1 TRAVEL

Discounts on vacation packages and flights through the AARP Travel Center Powered by Expedia, plus expedited passport services with RushMyPassport.



2 LIVING WELL

Learn healthy habits with the AARP® Personalized Nutrition Recipe Analyzer—plus, get daily tips and activities from Purposeful by Kumanu to help you build a stronger sense of purpose.



3 TECH TIPS & TRICKS
Build your skills with fun, free tech classes through the AARP Technology Resource Center. Plus, savings on cellphone plans from Consumer Cellular.



4 GAS & AUTO SERVICES
Travel confidently this holiday season with tips from the AARP Smart Guide to Car Maintenance, plus courses and free events from AARP Driver Safety.

5 RESTAURANTS
Treat yourself! Savings and local coupons at restaurants like Auntie Anne's, Moe's Southwest Grill, Rainforest Cafe and more. Plus, healthy eating tips and meal ideas.

6 FAMILY CAREGIVING
Even in the busiest season, you don't have to navigate caregiving alone. Get practical tips, guides and more for every step of your journey.

7 TAKE THE BENEFITS DISCOVERY CHALLENGE!
It's quick and easy to uncover savings and benefits tailored just for you.



Explore even more benefits online and download the new and improved AARP Now app for benefits near you.

aarp.org/benefitsme



The AARP
**Book
Excerpt**



And for My Next Trick ...

How performing magic as a kid—sometimes badly—set me up
for a great career of comedy and pratfalls

By Dick Van Dyke

A LOT OF comedians got their start doing magic—Johnny Carson, Steve Martin, Jason Alexander and yours truly. Some people say it's because magic tricks and jokes are kind of the same structure: setup, build, punch line or poof! Once you have that rhythm in your bones as a performer, it's a natural crossover.

My love of trickery started when I was a little kid and saw a magic show for the first time. Some folks can just enjoy the illusion and leave it at that. But I was in the category of kid who needed to figure out how it was done.

At first, I just experimented on my own—hiding things in my sleeve, building a secret panel inside an old top hat—but I didn't get far without

an instruction book. Luckily, my mother picked up on my new interest, and for Christmas that year, I got a whole magic set. I practiced all the tricks for hours in front of the mirror. Pretty soon, I got really good at palming things—coins, handkerchiefs, cards. There was a bowl-and-water trick I loved too.

For many Christmases after that, I

got a new magic set with a fresh set of tricks to master. This was the Depression, so the magic kit was the only present I got. Which was fine by me.

When I was around 12, I took my act public, setting up my little table of tricks at the ladies lunches held at our local Kiwanis club. I pulled in \$3 a show! Being mothers themselves, the ladies were an adoring and forgiving audience; they dutifully gasped and tittered as coins vanished behind my handkerchief and reappeared behind their ears.

But looking back, it felt like maybe there was another layer to their delight with me. They seemed surprised that a 12-year-old boy could be so warm and well-spoken. I was connecting with them not as mothers but as people, maybe even peers. As a performer, I realized I was learning the power of charm.

After that, I discovered another key element of the magician's persona: "cool." Oddly enough, there was a club of hobbyist magicians in Danville, Illinois, adult men—local store owners and businessmen—and they got wind of my talent (from their wives, I guess) and invited me to join them. I was all of 13 at the time, the only kid in the club, and right away they made me their project. Their technical tips were amazing (many, beyond my abilities), and they showed me how to keep my pre-trick patter feeling fresh.

But most important were their lessons in demeanor. As successfully as I had charmed the Kiwanis ladies, the men spotted in my act tiny hints of struggle—a card fumble here, a stammer there—that would, if unchecked, accumulate into a fatal failure of audience trust. Meaning, they wouldn't "buy" my illusions. If I couldn't stop myself from sweating, my Magic Elders declared, I needed to get better at hiding it.

So it was then that I began to cultivate an air of composure. At home and at magic club practices, I worked

to make every little wrist movement graceful, every word assured, until the Elders were finally impressed.

Not long after this suave persona was born, though, it was thoroughly dismantled.

At around 15, I landed my biggest venue yet for performing my magic: the high school assembly, an audience of 1,400 students. At Danville High, assembly was a showcase for the performing arts, whether it was a traveling orchestra or a drama club skit. It was a cherished part of our school culture, and everyone took their performances very seriously.

For my act, I decided on an illusion I'd recently mastered and felt sure would wow: the Egg Bag Trick, which involved making an egg disappear in a "magic bag." At home, I hollowed



I began to cultivate an air of composure ... to make every movement graceful, every word assured.

out two raw eggs by poking holes in either end, then blowing out the yolks. I practiced the trick and my patter, turned on the charm and kept my cool.

As I strode onstage—my smile easy and assured—I was pretty sure I was making the right first impression. I set the bag and two eggs on a table, then launched into my intro, feeling each syllable as I hit it.

Then, in my peripheral vision, I detected some unexpected movement.

But I knew that faltering equaled death, so I kept my gaze ahead and continued talking. Then my brain processed what I'd just glimpsed—my two eggs slowly rolling across the table—and even then, I didn't break composure.

Only when I heard a nervous titter from the audience, followed by a pair of sad little crunches on the stage floor, did I give in to the reality of failure. I followed my audience's eyes over to my eggs, cracked, misshapen and saggy. I felt total shame.

With that, the giggles turned into guffaws and hoots, roaring through the auditorium. I turned back to face the crowd, and in that split second—though I didn't consciously know it at the time—I made a pretty big discovery about myself.

Yes, cool and charming can be a winning bit. But maybe it's only the setup! When that carefully constructed persona cracks and falls apart, it's funny as hell ... and maybe that's what my "magic act" really is.

On instinct, I let this new persona spread its wings. Others might have skulked into the wings, humiliated. Instead, I took a deep bow, then walked triumphantly off the stage, as if nothing had gone wrong at all.

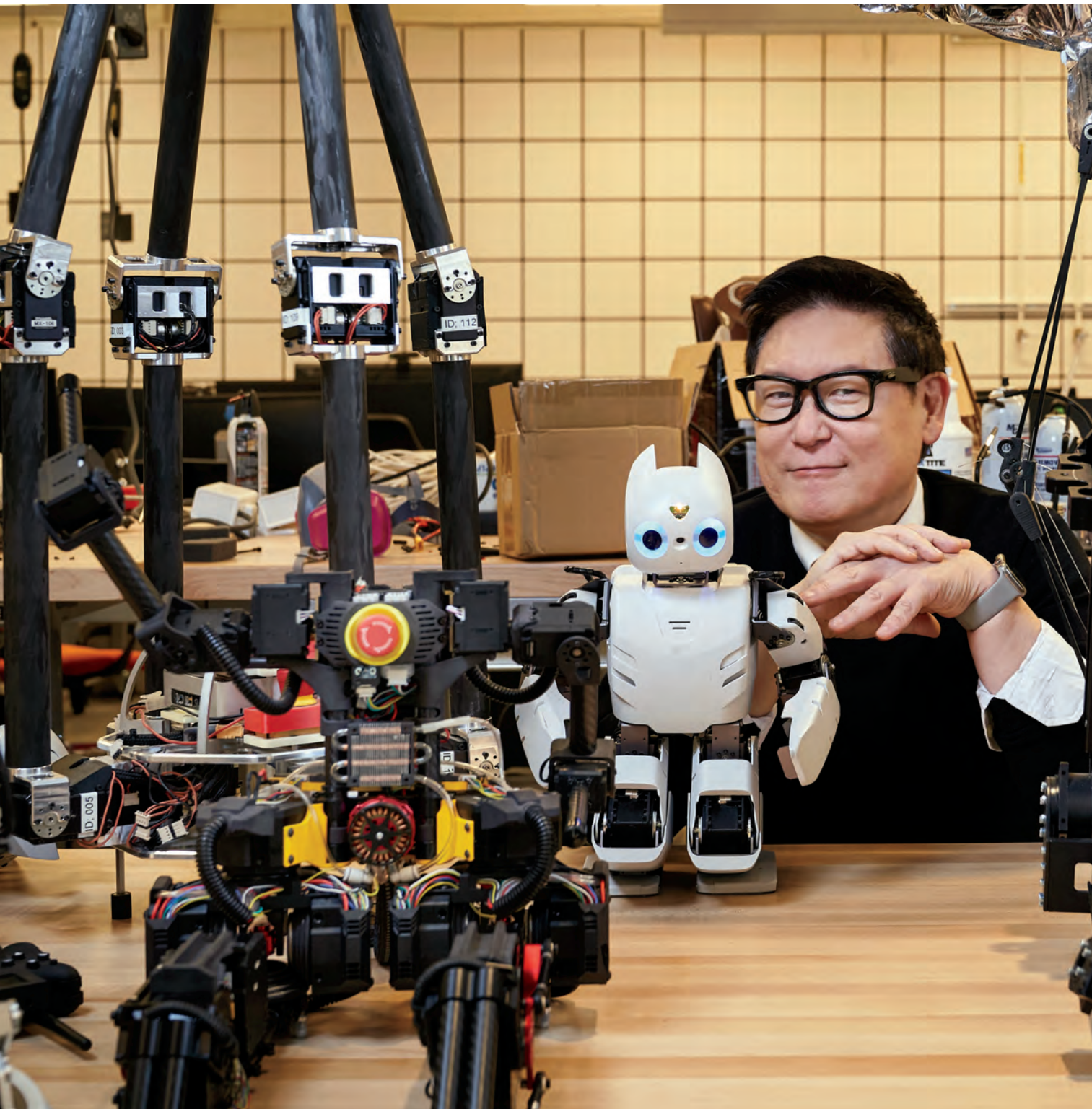
The crowd went wild. This time, I *really* had them.

All these years later, now that I see my bridge from magic to comedy, it's as bright as the Vegas Strip. In trying at magic, I found my tools and ingredients as a performer. In failing at magic, I landed the role of a lifetime. I mean, what is Rob Petrie's ottoman trip, if not the perfection of the high school egg fail? ■

Adapted from 100 Rules for Living to 100: An Optimist's Guide to a Happy Life by Dick Van Dyke, published on November 18, 2025. An Emmy, Tony and Grammy winner, Van Dyke—who turns 100 on December 13—starred or appeared in dozens of movies, TV shows and plays, including the classic films Mary Poppins and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

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REAL/PEOPLE



Inspiring stories
of friends and
neighbors, in
their own words

INSIDE ▶ CONFRONTING CHRONIC
PAIN ON A FOUR-WHEELER P. 66

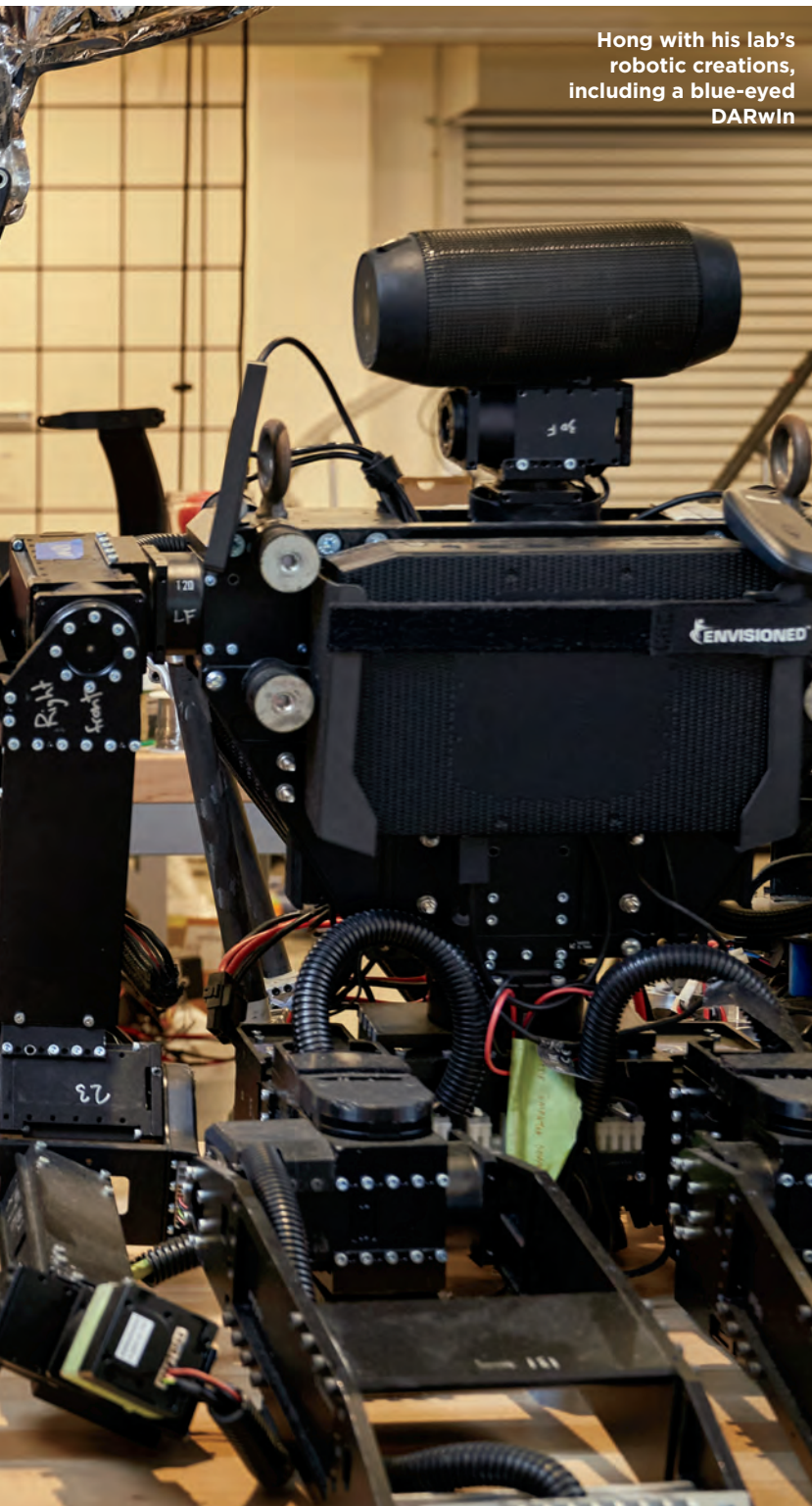
THE MOVIE THEATER THAT DEVELOPS
TALENT—AND CHANGES LIVES P. 67

Machine Maker

Robots for All

In Dennis Hong's laboratory, students explore the frontier between science and science fiction

Hong with his lab's
robotic creations,
including a blue-eyed
DARwIn



EVERYONE THOUGHT I was crazy. In 2010, I made the miniature humanoid robot DARwIn-OP, and then I made its programming code, blueprints and other information freely available for anyone to read, copy or adapt. My goal was never to patent and sell this robot. It was to expand knowledge. Today, thousands of DARwIns help teach robotic locomotion and autonomous action in labs around the world. Someone even put instructions online for 3D printing your own robot.

My students and I have created some 50 unique robots here at UCLA. Some jump like spiders; others roll like amoebas. We've designed robots to fight fires and deliver food to the homeless. ARTEMIS, another creation, was originally the fastest walking humanoid robot in the world. As with DARwIn, we're making the design of ARTEMIS open source, which will accelerate its development, to hopefully bring us closer to the time when robots can help us in our daily lives.

To do this work, you have to understand mechanics and algorithms—but robotics is so much more than that. It's also about imagination, storytelling, even beauty. I bring robots into the world not just as machines that do tasks but as companions that inspire wonder—that same wonder I felt seeing *Star Wars* for the first time. The droids R2-D2 and C-3PO blew my mind as a kid, and now I'm building their descendants.

The 2025 Netflix film *The Electric State* features a sentient robot, made with CGI. But for press events, the filmmakers wanted a functioning character, an actual robot, so they came to my lab and we made them one. This blurring of the line between robotics and art is what I'm most excited about.

Even though I'm getting older, inside I feel younger than my students. I always tell them that if you're not working joyfully, you're not maximizing your potential. —As told to Gregg Segal

Robotist Dennis Hong, 54, is a professor at the UCLA School of Engineering and director of RoMeLa (Robotics & Mechanisms Laboratory) in Los Angeles.

The Unstoppable Marsha Garcia

This veteran ATV racer faces chronic pain with a competitor's resolve



Garcia competes to help herself and inspire others to cope with pain.

disorder called trigeminal neuralgia (TN), which mostly affects women over 50 and has no cure.

TN is often called the “suicide disease” because that stabbing pain in the face is so horrific that a lot of people say they don’t want to live. I was the opposite. I was like, “What are we gonna do about it?” So I started TN Warrior Racing, a nonprofit that raises awareness about the disease so people can get it diagnosed early and be part of a community. The “racing” in the name is just a way to highlight my own story and let people know that life is not over because you have TN—or any chronic disease.

Racing makes me feel unstoppable. I tell myself: If I can get out there for 50 minutes at high speed, I can take on my pain. I want others to feel that kind of motivation. Just get out from under the covers and keep pushing. Anything you do is a win.

—As told to Bridgette Reilly

Veteran amateur ATV racer Marsha Garcia, 55, is an event facilitator in Goodyear, Arizona.

THE FIRST time I got on an ATV, I loved everything about it—the wind in my face and the freedom to go fast and not worry about anything. Then I went to an ATV race, and even though I was married with kids, I said, “I wanna do that,” and I did. I entered my first race when I was 31. I’m 55 now, and there’s still nothing like suiting up, putting on your goggles, hearing those bikes rev up with gas and seeing that flag go up.

Now, I’ve had my pity parties. A few years ago, I developed a striking pain toward the back of my head that

got more intense over the years. But none of the doctors had an answer, and medications didn’t help. Then one day I scratched my head and felt what seemed like a bolt of electricity shoot through my face. A neurologist finally diagnosed me with a nerve



MEMBERS ONLY
To see Garcia in action, go to aarp.org/marshagarcia or scan this code.

Changing Lives While Showing Movies

Valerie Jensen gives workers an opportunity to learn and grow

I'VE ALWAYS believed work gives us purpose. When I moved to Ridgefield, Connecticut, in 2002, I found a small musical theater group for adults with disabilities right across the street. My sister Hope, who has Down syndrome, joined in, and I began volunteering to write and direct shows. The cast quickly became my friends. They'd tell me about the jobs they couldn't get, the applications that went nowhere, and the discouragement of being turned away again and again. Watching their talent onstage, I knew the problem wasn't their ability—it was the lack of opportunity.

So I set out to create one. Ridgefield was preparing to demolish an old movie theater, and I saw a chance to save the building and create some-

thing new. With community support, I raised the money to open the non-profit Prospector Theater in 2014. We screen first-run films, run a café and employ more than 100 people, 80 percent of whom have disabilities. We call our employees "prospect" because, like prospectors during the gold rush, we search for hidden treasures: people's passions and talents. That's what we call "sparkle." Our mission is to help each person polish that sparkle, build their résumé and launch a career. Some have already moved on to jobs in real estate, banking, academia and retail.

Hope works all over the theater, from the box office to concessions to the clean team. Her favorite part? She'll tell you herself: getting paid. She proudly juggles two paid jobs,

one with us and one at a local elementary school.

When the pandemic hit, we knew we had to get creative to keep people employed until theaters opened back up. So we doubled down on popcorn production, and that part of the enterprise has truly taken off.

When Hope was born, the doctors suggested my parents send her to an institution. Instead, they brought her home. Decades later, she—and every prospect—shows how much is possible when people are given a chance.

Valerie Jensen, 50, owns Gemstone Farm in New Canaan, Connecticut. Hope Ciota, 46, works at Prospector Theater and as a school lunch lady.

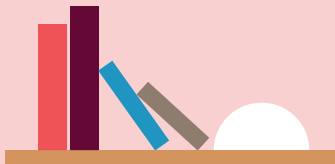


MEMBERS ONLY
For a video with Jensen,
go to aarp.org/valeriejensen
or scan this code.



Sisters Hope, left, and Valerie at Prospector Theater





“I was able to exhale for the first time in years.”

At 61, Deidre Champion struggled to land a job. She couldn't afford rent and was living with friends. Then she found AARP Foundation and learned vital skills that led to a great job and her own apartment. We're helping older adults like Deidre breathe easier by building economic opportunity.



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20 WAYS WE DELIVERED IN 2025

IT HAS BEEN a challenging year for many older Americans, and AARP responded by defending the things that are most important to those 50 and older. We hope these efforts make you glad to be part of the AARP family.

1. We helped older Americans send more than **2.6 million messages to Congress** urging legislators to protect the vital Social Security lifeline.

2. Taxpayers 65-plus may claim **an additional \$6,000 deduction**, thanks to a provision AARP pushed in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.



3. The **Ethel digital news-letter** and social channels reach 1.1 million older women a week, 200,000 of them in Ethel communities on Facebook.



4. Our **Fraud Watch Network Helpline** handled more than **100,000 calls** from people who were at risk of fraud.

5. 3.6 million people completed **AARP Rewards** activities redeemable for gift cards and more.



6. Veterans used **AARP resource guides** tens of thousands of times for help on caregiving, jobs and more.



7. More than **26 million people** a month visited **aarp.org** and the **AARP Now app**, invaluable sources of breaking news plus health and money reports.

8. Our volunteers dedicated **9.4 million hours** to support older Americans and their families.



9. AARP Movies for Grownups provided more than **435 free movie screenings** to over **200,000 film fans**.

10. Over 1.7 million people had their taxes prepared by **AARP Foundation Tax-Aide** and got more than \$1.3 billion in refunds and tax credits.

11. Older adults participated in **Senior Planet's computer classes** and training programs more than **800,000 times**.



12. **Wish of a Lifetime** from AARP reached a milestone of over 3,000 wishes granted for older adults since its inception in 2008.

13. AARP THE MAGAZINE and the AARP Bulletin remained the most-read publications in America while winning dozens of publishing awards.



14. AARP Books teamed up with Sanjay Gupta on *It Doesn't Have to Hurt*, a New York Times best-seller.



15. Our state and local teams connected **1.5 million people** to over **11,000 AARP-sponsored events**.

16. Caregivers can call **211** to connect with an **AARP/United Way program** that has assisted 1.7 million people in 5 years.

17. Amigas from AARP launched in 2025 as a bilingual Facebook community where Latinas can meet.

18. Legal Counsel for the Elderly turned 50, having helped nearly 150,000 low-income people with legal problems since 1975.

19. Staying Sharp, AARP's online brain health program, was visited more than 2.5 million times.




20. Our **AARP Studios** videos, including the *Fraud Wars* episodes, were viewed more than 290 million times on YouTube and other digital platforms.


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HOW WE'RE FIGHTING FOR YOU

AARP TAKES ON CAREGIVING



ONE IN 4 adults in the U.S. provide care for another adult or a child with special medical needs. That's 63 million Americans. Caregiving can be rewarding, but it comes with challenges. That's why AARP is committed to supporting family caregivers at every step.

Caregiving is part of our DNA at AARP. Our founder, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, was a family caregiver. For decades AARP has been working to make the caregiving journey easier, more informed and well supported.

Here's how we are helping:

► **Supporting caregivers.** AARP offers tools and information to help family caregivers navigate the health care system, manage financial and legal responsibilities, and make time for their own well-being. Millions of caregivers turn to aarp.org/caregiving for expert articles and downloadable, state-specific guides. And many find support through our active AARP Family Caregivers Discussion Group on Facebook.

► **Connecting locally.** Our state

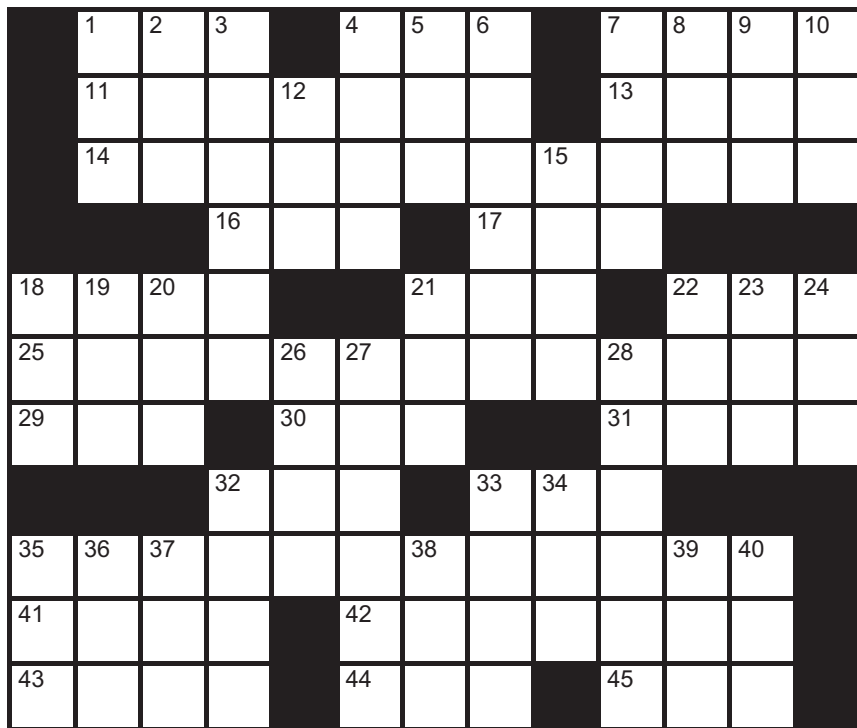
offices host more than 1,200 events each year, from educational workshops to caregiver meetups, often in partnership with local organizations and volunteers. Go to aarp.org/localcaregiving to find events near you. We're also teaming up with United Way Worldwide and 211 to expand access to caregiving support. In over 40 percent of the country, caregivers who call 211 are connected with specially trained agents who offer local referrals for services like transportation, food delivery, home safety and more.

► **Advocating for change.** AARP supports three bipartisan bills before Congress that would save family caregivers time and money. **Credit for Caring Act:** Would offer up to \$5,000 in federal tax credits to help cover caregiving expenses for eligible working caregivers.

Lowering Costs for Caregivers Act: Would allow caregivers to use health savings accounts and flexible spending accounts for a parent's or parent-in-law's qualified medical expenses. **Alleviating Barriers for Caregivers Act:** Would streamline government forms and processes to reduce red tape.

► **Growing support.** Sixty percent of family caregivers work outside the home. AARP is raising awareness among employers and health care providers to better support these caregivers. Thousands of employers now offer AARP caregiving resources to their staff. AARP volunteers and experts have delivered education in hundreds of workplaces. We're also working with major health care systems to make caregivers part of the care team. Visit aarp.org/healthcareprofessionals to find out more. —**Bob Stephen, AARP vice president, health and caregiving**

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CROSSWORD

Wintry Words

ACROSS

- 1 Type of desktop
- 4 Org. that includes Marlins and Mariners
- 7 Coffee shop amenity
- 11 Elevated land mass
- 13 At any time
- 14 Recruitment hiatus
- 16 LBJ and HST, for two, but not FDR
- 17 Gave nourishment
- 18 Masquerade (as)
- 21 Charge
- 22 Earn, after expenses
- 25 Undeniable info
- 29 Introverted
- 30 Big commotion
- 31 Sway gently

- 32 Finish line
- 33 Well-suited
- 35 Starts a conversation
- 41 Televises
- 42 Keep tabs on
- 43 Sydney salutation
- 44 '60s war zone
- 45 Pull

DOWN

- 1 Letters on dashboards
- 2 Oscar winner for *Moonlight* and *Green Book*
- 3 Whittling
- 4 Clothing store section
- 5 Fall behind
- 6 Polished to a high gloss
- 7 Lawn intruder
- 8 Suffix for subject or effect
- 9 A hat or an African city
- 10 State of rage
- 12 Helpful hint
- 15 Coral formation
- 18 Alternatives to 1-Across
- 19 Exclamation of amazement
- 20 Crafty
- 21 To's companion
- 22 Cpl. or sgt.
- 23 List-shortening letters
- 24 Scolding sound
- 26 Bit of hair or yarn
- 27 Appends
- 28 Creative virtuoso
- 32 Lenient
- 33 Polite interruption
- 34 According to
- 35 Pouch for pekoe
- 36 Freed (of)
- 37 Chapter of history
- 38 New Deal power agcy.
- 39 Corporate honcho
- 40 Exclamation of disgust

THINK

SPELLING LESSON

What nine-letter word for a popular college major has exactly one of each of the vowels **A, E, I, O and U**? (Hint: It begins with a vowel.)



WORDPLAY

FALLEN APART

The eight letters in the word

CRUMBLED

can be rearranged to form a pair of common four-letter words in only one way. What are those two words?

NUMBER FUN

WHAT'S NEXT?



There's a pattern to how each number, after the first in the series, is derived from the number preceding it. Following that pattern, what comes after 24?

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Up-to-date news, resources and tips on dementia and cognitive health

SIGOURNEY WEAVER

CONTINUED FROM 39

Weaver startled him, she once recalled, when she began “to growl and bark and gnaw on the cushions.” Reitman cut the tape and said, “Don’t ever do that again.”

Shooting the 1999 cult classic *Galaxy Quest*, Weaver parodied the dizzy, buxom blond stereotype, dressed in a wig and enhanced breast padding. As costar Alan Rickman later recalled, she would return to her hotel at the end of a workday in full costume, just to enjoy people’s reactions.

With visionary director James Cameron, Weaver says, she found a cinematic soulmate. Like her father, the *Avatar* and *Aliens* director groks Weaver’s wry humor—“We make each other laugh,” she says—and intuits the awkward teen still lurking and aching within.

The first *Avatar*, in which Weaver played botanist Grace Augustine, came out in 2009 and became the world’s highest-grossing film of all time. For the second and third installments, Cameron created the role of Kiri, a 14-year-old Na’vi girl that Weaver portrayed in a motion-capture suit. “He told me, ‘You’re so immature. Nobody knows that, and you’ll be fine doing this.’ For better or worse, I feel a lot in common with Kiri,” she says.

The star has already signed on to do two more *Avatar* sequels, taking her up to 2031. She’s also considering bringing back Ellen Ripley for more space-creature killing—which would be her fifth turn in the role. “It’s very gratifying,” she says, “that this character has continued to represent things that are inspiring to people.”

A Distinct Sense of Home

Perhaps her greatest Hollywood superpower isn’t her high-flying and enduring career so much as her gift for sustaining a stable, private family life amid the industry’s chaos.

She and Simpson live in midtown Manhattan. Their only child—Charlotte, 35, an adjunct assistant professor at Columbia University—and

new son-in-law are in temporary residence. They dine on Simpson’s vegan specialties, catch movies and stroll through Central Park.

There’s no one like your child to remind you of who you really are. “Inside, I’m still that shy little person, and that’s never going to change. My family certainly knows that I’m not like Ripley,” Weaver says, laughing. “I’m very human.”

Her hometown also keeps her grounded, Weaver adds. “I love living in New York,” she says. “It’s the place I feel most sane. In Los Angeles, people are obsessed with the film business. In New York, everyone thinks that what they’re doing is the most important thing, and they all live together with their obsessions. I think it’s healthier.”

Despite her attachment to New York and family, the actor ventured to her mother’s homeland in the spring of 2024 for a personal milestone: her London stage debut. Her casting—as Prospero in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—was the firm and final answer to the doubts of long-ago naysayers, including a particularly dear one.

“I had to wait until my mother died to do theater in London,” she confesses. Once again, Weaver’s voice softens. “She would not have been in the front row cheering me on. I don’t know why. I can’t explain it.” (Weaver’s father died in 2002, and her mother, in 2007.)

But maybe, I suggest, her mother was with her in spirit?

“Kind of ... a little bit,” she says, recalling some of the magic she felt when she arrived in London’s West End. Film and TV may have made her career, but the theater? “That’s my home,” she says. “When I got to the star’s dressing room, I felt like the theater gods had wanted me to come, as if they were saying, ‘You’ve earned the right to be here. We’ve always been on your side. I’m glad we can tell you now.’” ■

Natasha Stoyanoff is an award-winning journalist, screenwriter and New York Times best-selling author who frequently writes about celebrities and culture for AARP THE MAGAZINE. Her most recent collaboration is Chasing Evil: Shocking Crimes, Supernatural Forces, and an FBI Agent’s Search for Hope and Justice, with John Edward and Robert Hilland.



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SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES ON PAGE 72

M	A	C		M	L	B		W	I	F	I	
P	L	A	T	E	A	U		E	V	E	R	
H	I	R	I	N	G	F	R	E	E	Z	E	
		V	P	S		F	E	D				
P	O	S	E		F	E	E		N	E	T	
C	O	L	D	H	A	R	D	F	A	C	T	S
S	H	Y		A	D	O		R	O	C	K	
			E	N	D	A	P	T				
B	R	E	A	K	S	T	H	E	I	C	E	
A	I	R	S		O	V	E	R	S	E	E	
G	D	A	Y		N	A	M		T	O	W	

SPELLING LESSON: EDUCATION; **FALLEN APART:** CURB and MELD; **WHAT'S NEXT?** 20. (60 is 1/2 of 120; 40 is 2/3 of 60; 30 is 3/4 of 40; 24 is 1/2 of 30; and 20 is 2/5 of 24.)

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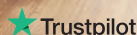
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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Tiger Woods

(DECEMBER 30): The golf legend has been a star player from the start.

EARLY YEARS: Eldrick Tont Woods was born in Cypress, California, to Earl, a retired U.S. Army officer, and Kultida, originally from Thailand. They nicknamed their son Tiger in honor of a friend of Earl's, a South Vietnamese colonel who shared the moniker.

YOUNG TALENT: Woods began playing golf as a toddler and was so impressive that, at a young age, he appeared on *The Mike Douglas Show* and *That's Incredible!*

COLLEGE TO PRO: In 1994, Woods joined the Stanford University golf team. He turned pro after two years.

RECORD COLLECTION: Woods was rated the No. 1 golf player in the world for the most consecutive weeks (281) and most total weeks (683) in history. In 2019, he became the second-oldest golfer to win the Masters, at 43.

ON AGING: "The fire still burns to compete," Woods said in 2024. "But ... the body just won't recover like it used to. That's ... part of an athlete's journey." —Whitney Matheson

★ 82 ★
Woods' PGA Tour wins



MORE MILESTONE BIRTHDAYS

Jeffrey Wright
DECEMBER 7
Emmy- and Tony-winning actor starred in 2025's *The Phoenician Scheme*.

60

Geena Davis
JANUARY 21
Actor wrote and illustrated *The Girl Who Was Too Big for the Page*, a children's book.

70

John Lydon
JANUARY 31
Former Sex Pistol (Johnny Rotten) launched a 2025 tour with his band Public Image Ltd.

70

Bette Midler
DECEMBER 1
Entertainer is active with the New York Restoration Project, a nonprofit she founded.

80

Dolly Parton
JANUARY 19
Singer's Imagination Library, which gives free books to kids, celebrated 30 years in 2025.

80

Alan Alda
JANUARY 28
Actor recently made a cameo in *The Four Seasons*, the Netflix series based on his 1981 film.

90



Photo credits and information on page 74



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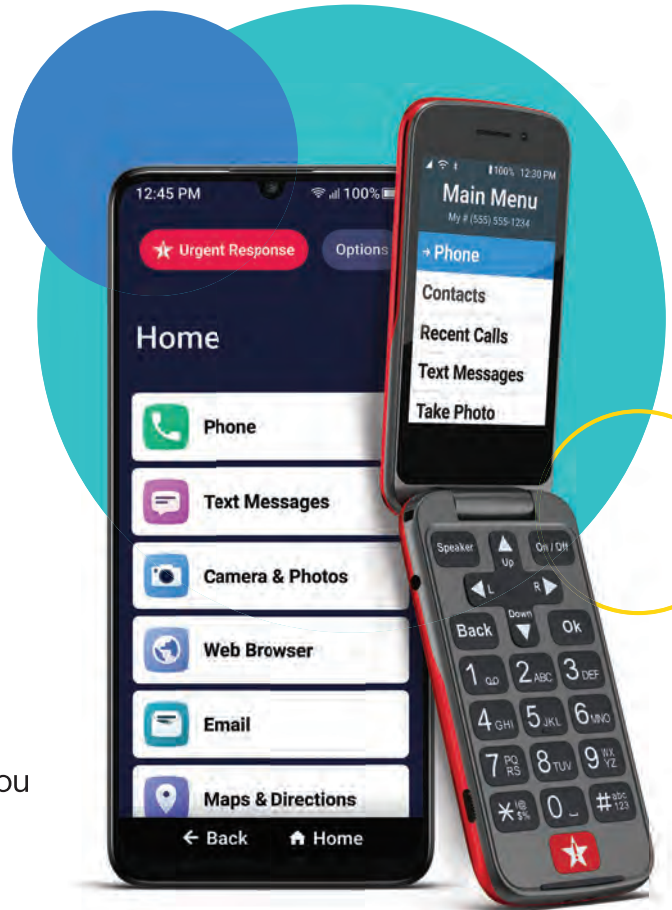
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