

“Blue. River. Apple.” and “Blue. River. Apple. Second Harvest.”

Media kit

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 2013, in the middle of a conventional senior lifestyle – busy with work, family, friends and an overall grand life – a diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer’s disease took Nancy Nelson by surprise. The diagnosis changed her life in a way no one (even she) expected: she became a poet and published author.

“There are so many people who handle the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s in different ways,” she said. “You will never hear me say, ‘I have Alzheimer’s.’ You’ll hear me say, ‘I was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.’ I don’t let it define me. It’s not who I am.”

All of her life, Nelson says she was “nudged” to do things she didn’t think she was capable of doing. In 2000, at the age of 60, she learned to swim and ride a bicycle in order to participate and finish a triathlon. So, when she immediately started to write poetry – another unfamiliar activity – almost immediately after her diagnosis it wasn’t completely surprising. Oftentimes at 3 or 4 in the morning, she would awake and begin writing as if the words were channeled to her. Her feelings of intermittent fear, frustration and scarcity in struggling with such a dreadful disease, one that took her father, transformed to feelings of inner strength, resolve and sometimes awe.

The determination that pushed her to learn to swim in order to complete the half-mile water portion of the triathlon also forced her to not take her diagnosis lying down. And she wasn’t about to blindly take medications, just because a doctor handed them to her.

When she walked into her holistic physician’s office, she couldn’t recall how to draw a clock – from the circle to the hands to the numbers. She had drawn a blank. Through these and other similar encounters with all sorts of practitioners, Nelson found a Mediterranean diet, coconut oil, herbs and exercise has increased her functionality. She sought after and found the balance that worked for her – something she encourages all people to do, regardless of health

“I can now draw you that clock,” she said.

Nelson grew up and was living in a small bedroom community outside Seattle when her family enticed her to migrate to Las Vegas nearly 50 years ago. She spent 26 years of her professional life working for a major airline, which also allowed her to travel worldwide. Recently retired from a well-known insurance company and ready to relinquish her fast and furious pace, she now claims a calmer, quieter life as a writer. She has taken several writing classes, worked with a writing coach, attended the Wordcrafters Writing Conference this year in Eugene, Oregon, and attends two bi-monthly writing groups.

In 2013, the year of her diagnosis, Nelson served on the Leadership Council with the Desert Southwest Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association and was the chapter’s volunteer of the year in 2016. On the national level, she served on the National Early-Stage Alzheimer’s Advisory Group (ESAG) directed through the Alzheimer’s Association headquarters in Chicago. Nelson and all of the ESAG members (2006-2016) were honored with the Outstanding Advocate of the Year award during the Advocacy Forum, applauding the group’s work to raise awareness of the

disease and advocate on behalf of the millions of people living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

It is through sharing, stepping up and speaking out that Nelson finds her solace and her calling to emancipate the stigma attached to the people relegated to a diminishing memory. The cause, she says, bolsters the "roguish, stubborn ruggedness in me for a worthwhile fight" and to maintain dignity, honor and respect through all of it.

Nelson has two daughters, Michelle and Jennifer, and four grandchildren, Brayden, Delaney, Rachel Anne and Jack. She is currently working on a children's book with Delaney about how to talk with children about a grandparent getting dementia.

ABOUT THE BOOKS

"Blue. River. Apple: An Exploration of Alzheimer's Through Poetry"

"Blue. River. Apple. (Second Harvest): A Continuing Exploration of Alzheimer's Through Poetry"

The title "Blue. River. Apple." is derived from a memory test physicians often give patients when they're trying to diagnose memory deficiency. Typically, patients are given three randomly selected words to remember at the beginning of a conversation and asked by the physician to repeat those words at the end of the conversation. At the end of the test, the words "blue," "river" and "apple" were the three author Nancy Nelson was supposed to remember, although she could recall only one of them.

Although she had never written poetry before, Nelson found the words pouring out of her shortly after her diagnosis. The words chronicling the new life as she knew it awoke her daily between 3 and 5 a.m. It was raw and cathartic and tracked the rises and falls of her journey.

Poems in each of the books cover every emotion Nelson associates with her new life – from sadness, fear, frustration and confusion to joy, confidence, strength and purpose.

A portion of the books' proceeds will be donated to the Alzheimer's Association. "Blue. River. Apple." can be purchased on [Amazon](#) (\$14.79, paperback; \$2.99, digital), ISBN-13: 978-0990426608.

"Blue. River. Apple. (Second Harvest): A Continuing Exploration of Alzheimer's Through Poetry" can also be purchased on [Amazon](#) (\$14.95, paperback), ISBN-13: 978-0990426622.

For more information visit BlueRiverApple.com.

ABOUT ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA

Alzheimer's disease, the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, is a type of dementia that causes problems with thinking, memory and behavior. The most common form of dementia, Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of dementia cases. The majority of cases occur in people age 65 and older, but approximately 200,000 Americans under the age of 65 have early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Over time, patients can go from mild lapses to, during the late stages of the disease, loss of the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their

environment. There is no cure; however, treatments are available to slow the progression and improve the life of patients.

Warning signs include:

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning or solving problems
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, work or at leisure
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
- Decreased or poor judgment
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Changes in mood and personality

Information: www.alz.org

SAMPLE POEMS

Blue. River. Apple.

Today's journey:
Develop courage,
Splash on a smile,
Be who I want to be,
Not afraid of who I am becoming.

To awake at night, fearful of forgetting
Important and precious things like ...
People. Dates. Times. Appointments.

I am not in control. Please help me, God.
Thoughts jumble, words disappear.
Times mix up, promises go astray.
When I hear, "Where are you?" "Are you coming?"
Eyes water, stomach churns, humbled in disbelief.

I know I have done it again!

*Do I stay home, cancel, quit?
Or fight for right of passage through the fog?*

Silently, I say, I am not what I appear.
I am sorry for what you see.
Breathe in courage,
Splash on a smile,
Struggle to remember ...

I must find pieces of myself and revel in who I know I am.

Chin up, treading lightly in new uncharted waters.
At times, I catch sideways glances, back and forth.
Perhaps, even, your voice impatient. *I understand.*
But, wait, we stand together, separate.
Can you hear me? I have so much to tell you.
I try to mask the imperfections.
A dab of foundation, a blush of pink.
Dressed in clothes, jewelry, and resolve
Daily, though, I have to make sense of where I am.

On the sliding scale of ... **Blue. River. Apple.**

I want to be Positive.
I **am** Productive.
I **am** Loving and Beloved.
I **am** Grateful, Creative, Alive.

Therefore ...
I **am** blessed with a voice to tell my inner story.

Blue. River. Apple.

I.SAW.ME

I sit, reticent and quiet
In a doctor's office soft chair,
Curious about others coming and going
When enters a man and his wife.

She was hunched over, following, not really
there.

They settle directly across from me.
I try to refocus on my magazine article,
But in one ear, softly overhear,

"Why am I here?" from her lost face
And blank stare to her obviously armored
husband's ear.

"We're visiting," he quietly says, no smile,
anywhere,
Not even an eye, giving her grace.
So I do—though perhaps not my place.

"Wh-ere?" slowly articulated in two syllables,
she asks.
"Doctor's office. We're visiting here,"
Keeping his newspaper held tight.
I wonder how hard this is for him. I guess,
very hard.

For sure, I know it is captivatingly difficult
For me to watch and hear.
Like overhearing a family feud,
Knowing I have no business listening.

"I don't want to be here,"
She mimics and nudges forward, nearer to
him.

Silence reigns supreme.

No motion he makes to comfort her.

Then, she tentatively looks up at him
And snuggles in under his arm,

And inquires one more time, *"Why are we
here?"*

I imagine he dreads, as much as she, this
office visit.
*Why else would he casually answer her
Without even a look up?*

"Just for a few minutes," were the words he
could spare.

"I don't want to be here," she repeats her
thought.

Not tuning in,
Nor eyes that leave his news print yet, he says,
"Ummm, I know."
A tired man, his look of resignation burns
deep
The pages he probably doesn't see.

Every motion of his body reeks, perfunctory.

I pretend I do not see. But I do.

I feel sorry for him.
Or should I want to shake him, I ask myself.

Who am I saddest for ... him, her, or me?

I can't help but wonder ...
*Who will be sitting on that weathered
Red-leather couch—with me?*

I am sure it will be someone who will stop,
look,
And listen to me as though I matter.

Suddenly, I get up to leave—I am ready to
go—
Even though this is my very favorite doctor of
all.

And that is saying one heck of a lot, you
know,
As I hear, "Hello, Nancy. Come right in."

VULNERABLE

Days of tortuous uncertainty.
I stand
Flustered.
Unsure.

Weak—
Like a fallen bird with a broken wing
Unable to fly.
Grounded,
Wobbling without precision and grace.

Vulnerability creeps in—
Alzheimer's Early-Stages.

Loss of Speech,
Thought,
and Will,
Memory
and . . .
Certain depths of despair,
Inside unseen.

Now ride within a flow of tears,
Hot against my cheek bone.
My own words,
Sometimes caught,
Sometimes gratefully not.

This is becoming my off and on,
Day-to-day reality.
Forever asking questions,
Seeking answers,
Gathering the guts to understand.

Poignantly, I think, listen to me,
I'm right on today.

No, here, listen to me!
I think I am . . . right on today.

And, then,
I know I'm not.

RESPONSES

“Wow! I am blown away and brought to tears. My own mother can no longer communicate except for a few words or an occasional sentence. Most of the time I can tell by her eyes she is in another place. She still smiles a lot which helps as I can believe that she is happy. There are times I know she wants to tell me things and I can guess by a word she says and the circumstance around us what she wants to say. Thank you for this book, as this has helped me.” -*Elizabeth Lonseth, author of A Gradual Disappearance, elizabethlonsethnovels.com*

“Nancy Nelson’s book is heartfelt, sincere, emotional. Her words flow effortlessly throughout, giving you, the reader, the opportunity to absorb the meaning of each stanza and verse. I love this book!” -*Brian LeBlanc, 2015 Early Stage Alzheimer’s Advisory Group, National Alzheimer’s Association*

Q&A

Q: Had you ever written poetry prior to writing these books?

A: No, it was the furthest thing from my mind.

Q: When did you first know something was wrong with your memory?

A: Close to 25 or 30 years ago, I had trouble connecting streets and as soon as eight years ago, I began stumbling when putting together puzzles or completing projects that required spatial recognition. In 2012, I had an aortic valve replacement during which I was given an extra dose of anesthetic. Doctors told me it could affect my memory, but I would get it all back after six to nine months. However, it only got worse. I was the secretary at the local Business Network International, and I would get up to speak in front of the group and completely lose my thoughts. When working, I might spend two or three hours with a person, and if they called me the next day, I might not remember them. Copious note taking and partnering up on appointments became my standard. It wasn’t very long though, I chose to retire out of deference for those served. I missed appointments, places and things. I found myself making excuses and began to realize I had a problem.

Q: Why did you decide to title your book with the words you were given in your memory test?

A: I wish I could take the credit but Brian Rouff and his team at iMAGiNE Communications came up with the title. I loved it the minute I heard it...and I’m betting on remembering it forever!

Q: Explain the distance that exists between patients and caregivers and their experiences.

A: Communication is the key when Alzheimer’s disease (AD) rears its ugly symptoms. Out of the blue, it seems, you have someone you dearly love, now a stranger in your own home. Or a stranger is living where your mom, dad, grandmother, grandfather, aunt and uncle, work associate or friend, once lived. This new-found stranger may be unable to manage for themselves because of something called Alzheimer’s. What now? You don’t have 15 minutes to spare in your own world, and now this! Unwanted and unasked for bigger-than-life drama, theirs and

yours, often stretches patience, know-how, and stamina to its furthest limits. Hard to put yourself in a place you've never been – another person's Alzheimer's moccasins – but you must.

Learn and know that your loved one is not trying to frustrate or anger you. They cannot help the condition they're in. They are merely frustrated and angry with themselves, and you, because they cannot speak, say, or think as they once did. In loving kindness, speak up and face the fear you feel, and help yourself and those who cannot speak for themselves. It's difficult, maybe impossible, to fathom the changes taking place before your eyes. I get it. I feel it, too. Knowledge is power and making life easier for both sides is golden. Whether it's an in-family or professional caregiver, family member, friend, or work associate, no matter who it is, communication is the key.

Q: Why do you encourage people to take control of their own health?

A: I believe becoming a partner in your own health is paramount, and finding what works for you may take some experimenting. You know yourself. If you don't, there's no time like the present to learn. No shoe fits every foot. I decided early on that my job was to learn all I could about Alzheimer's, and with memory limitations, I read and reread. I question. I forget. I apologize and ask again.

Q: What is the most prominent stigma of Alzheimer's disease you are working to eradicate?

A: 1) Communication is the key for all involved in making life easier after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's.
2) There is a misnomer that everyone diagnosed with Alzheimer's has an accurate diagnosis. There are many forms of memory loss under the umbrella of dementia, AD is named about 70 percent of the time. A second opinion never hurts.
3) Many people working with diminishing memory conditions are worthy of being heard. They are still viable and living well within their diagnosis. I'm always thinking, "Don't count me out just yet!"

Q: Why is it so important to you to share your story?

A: This is a speak-up and speak-out subject people would rather ignore and keep to themselves. It's about helping people who can't help themselves. I'm able to speak. So, I do. My dad sits on my shoulder. What if I knew more and could've helped him? I didn't know what I didn't know. There are 5.6 million people in the United States living with Alzheimer's disease and the statistics are going up and up – we must care and we must share.

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Nancy Nelson is eager to speak to groups and organizations. Please contact for availability.

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Review copies of “Blue. River. Apple” and “Blue. River. Apple. (Second Harvest)” are available upon request by all bona fide members of the media.