

# PROFILE

## Lost Then Found: My New Life in Retirement

*By Barbara Pagano*

**A**fter successfully navigating 2,000 miles in a 43-foot sailboat with my daughter, I was proud we never got lost at sea. But long after I learned the importance of waypoints and markers, I'd lose my bearing in a different way. I got lost on land.

It was a staggering surprise.

When I turned 65, I had good health and choices. It seemed all I had to do was figure out the rest of my life. What do I want to do now? How can I live my best life? Every morning I sat on my office couch with good intentions and a cup of coffee, and believe me, I tried hard to figure that out.

Despite graduate degrees in human behavior and many successful crossings into new life stages (I even pre-planned a very successful mid-life crisis for myself in my mid-forties), everything about this age I was now didn't fit me.

Even the word "retirement"—the word we most use for a pivot, a time in life beginning when we turn 65—didn't fit me. Did I want to keep working? Work in a different way? Travel? Volunteer? Bike the Pyrenees? Babysit the grandkids?

It shouldn't have been so hard, but it was. I never got depressed, but I was majorly confused about how to navigate the last third of my life. And I came to hate the question, "What's next?" If there was a yellow brick road to happiness and joy, I wanted to be on it. But where was that road, and who was I going to be now? What do I need to know, what do I need to do now, and how soon can I get started?

I wasted close to three years. That's precious time, folks. In due course, I ended up in libraries, bookstores, and classes and seminars to become a consummate learner of the current literature on aging, retirement, un-retirement, productive longevity, well-being, and happiness. Just like on that sailing endeavor, I learned something new every day. I buckled down, found a new way to ground myself, and create a life in retirement—not just a ho-hum, be-thankful-for-what-you've-got life, but an extraordinary one by my standards.

The journey to a new retirement life is open to anyone. Knowledge, self-awareness, and markers indicate the way.

# The 'New' Retirement

Turning 65 and facing retirement had seemed more of an event. I was wrong. If I had given as much preparation to life after 65 as I did before I set out to sea, I could have navigated through one of the biggest transitions in life with a steady wind at my back to guide me. But I didn't think of it as a passage. Overnight, it came like a rogue wave disrupting my life, threatening to shake my identity and cloak the future in a haze.

Mature adults turning 60 like me are now novices in an unfamiliar, uncharted landscape. We lack a keen understanding of three ideas necessary to build a new life of well-being:

1. Longevity's gift is an extra 25-30 years. That's a lifetime – one that holds freedom laced with wisdom.
2. Retirement's definition is no longer "stopping work." Instead, we find places for our talents and energy – paid or unpaid- with health, relevance, and community dividends. We choose our work.
3. Life after 65 will move forward one way or another. But just ahead ... do not underestimate what lies ahead. A bronco-busting ride through one of the most important transitions ever awaits.

The anticipation of freedom in retirement life is enough to make a 60-year-old giddy. But before making a list of to-do's or exploring options, we must get high on a sense of our potential and our own becoming. We must build our strength, and confidence and become laser-focused on what we want for ourselves.

My journey began with the understanding that my life had greater possibilities for many years ahead. Work was important, and finding ways to keep it within the borders of travel, family, and marriage was key. Getting out of my comfort zone was less about risk-taking and more about changing my beliefs – challenging the old model of retirement, finding one that suited me, and getting excited about it.

In our 60s, when we feel like we are heading toward retirement, even when there is no place to go, we can take one of the most important steps in a successful transition. We can grow our expectations of change.

We can begin to feel the beat of a different story. And we can prepare.

## The Transition Ahead

Retirement is not a feeling. Retirement is a transition. Some experts feel it is the most difficult transition in a lifetime. You can build a new life truer to your values, discover potential and become more of who you want to be. It's a big deal.

Retirement now is a place to embrace hopes and dreams, not just a place to get you all happy and joyous in the celebration of leisure and freedom. Life can be much more. You are asked to demand more from this life stage and shift the conversation from “What’s next?” to “What do I need to do now?” Then, proceed with enthusiasm.

## There is work to be done.

Pre-retirees and retirees who now feel they have settled for less can recalibrate. Begin with these questions:

- What do I want in life ahead?
- How can I utilize my potential?
- Who do I want to be?

Confused and unsure about what my future could be, I almost settled for much less happiness. I thank my stars I didn’t. Instead, I worked to understand and crack open one of the most worthwhile and challenging transitions life offers.

Out of curiosity, I began to interview pre-retirees and retirees to discover that many, like me, were unprepared for one of the most significant transitions in life – retirement. Today my work is helping individuals thrive in the last third of life through writing, coaching, and speaking

Life is full of wonder and joy, filled with work I love, freedom, financial reward, a re-worked marriage, and new and old friends. And yes, I’m a cracker-jack grandparent, and no, I didn’t win the lottery.

But that’s my extraordinary life in retirement.

What will be yours?

Barbara Pagano is an award-winning author, speaker, and coach who has motivated thousands of individuals to higher levels of performance in work and life. Her newest book, *“The 60-Something Crisis: How to Live an Extraordinary Life in Retirement.”*