

[Home](#) | [Specialty Focus](#) | [How Jennie took control of her ageing through study](#)

Jennie Cox with Murdoch University Chancellor Gary Smith. Picture: Murdoch University.

How Jennie took control of her ageing through study

By: [Caroline Riches](#) in [Specialty Focus, Top Stories](#) May 20, 2021 1 Comment

Jennie Cox has always jumped on any chance to learn. At 81, she's just completed a degree at Murdoch University and has already enrolled for a postgraduate course.

A former nurse from Perth, Cox studied for a nursing degree as soon as one became available in the late 80s. She followed it up with a postgraduate degree in clinical nursing alongside other practical studies.

At one point, she was at university at the same time as her three children.

When she retired at 68, it simply meant greater opportunities to learn. After attending lectures organised by the University of the Third Age, she decided she may as well enrol.

She chose a subject that was "completely different to health": a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Australian Indigenous Studies.

"It was quite a challenge because there were all these concepts that I'd never really taken on board," Cox told *Aged Care Insite*. "I just felt so stimulated."

She admits she struggled with the decision to study in her 70s at first.

"First I thought, why would I study at my age? But then I thought, I've probably got another 20 years to live. I am a voter, I need to be informed. I rationalised that no education could be wasted."

Having now graduated, Cox says she uses the information she learned "all the time".

"Every day of my life there's some connection between Indigenous people, deaths of black people, homeless people; it's all entwined. I use my knowledge every day in talking to people."

While her mind is seemingly unaffected by the signs of ageing, Cox suffers from chronic conditions and receives a home care package.

But she's determined to keep learning, and has enrolled in a four-year postgraduate course in world food security. After that, she's considering a masters degree.

Degrees a 'huge boost' to nursing

As well as transforming her own life, the capacity for learning has also transformed the nursing profession, she says.

In the early stages of her nursing career, her day was taken up by menial tasks. When nursing degrees appeared in the 80s, she says the profession saw a "huge boost".

RECENT POSTS



Without funding for critical physiotherapy services, older people are in danger of receiving the cheapest, not the best, care

May 31, 2021



Victorian aged care worker tests positive for COVID-19, reports virus has spread to residents

May 31, 2021



2021 budget investment into aged care is only the beginning

May 31, 2021



Digitisation to help aged care providers meet burgeoning demand: opinion

May 31, 2021



Survey: Most Australians would support an aged care tax

May 28, 2021

CONNECT WITH US



READ OUR LATEST EMAG

[eMag archive](#)

She believes today's nurses are multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled, better respected and better paid.

"Nurses today are much better informed," she said. "They know why they're taking blood and what's going to happen with it. They know their diseases."

Cox says nurses should be encouraged to learn as much as they can and to specialise, with gerontology becoming increasingly important.

'Wrong priorities' in aged care

Cox worked as a community nurse on the aged care assessment team in Fremantle during the 80s, trying to keep people at home for as long as possible. Back then, she says, residential aged care was "very poor".

In recent decades she says she's seen "huge improvements" in aged care, in rehabilitation and in the push to keep people at home for longer.

But she believes the sector requires huge investment, and aged care homes need highly trained nurses around the clock – way more than the 40 minutes per resident per day by 2023 mandated in the recent federal budget.

"People are growing older with chronic disease. A person in high-level aged care now is virtually a critical patient needing full nursing and clinical care for multiple issues. They can't be looked after by untrained people."

Care is everything, Cox believes, but says many residential aged care facilities have got their priorities wrong.

"It's silly to offer five-star living when you haven't got the care."

Taking control of ageing

As we age, Cox believes we "become unheard".

"We simply fade away," she said. "But it doesn't have to be that way."

And Cox encourages Australians to take control of their own ageing – if they're able to.

"Think about your own planning, involve your family and your GP and talk to other people. What life options will you consider? Do you want to go down the euthanasia line, for example?"

In the meantime, she says, live the best way you can. After all, she's discovered something surprising: even in her later years, her life continues to get better.

"A lot of people think 'oh I'm going to grow old, I'm going to deteriorate' and it's not true.

"As I grow older I find I'm having a better time. You have time to read and think, which is pretty special."

Cox doesn't think she'd be in such good shape without her studies.

"I couldn't have done it without the stimulation I get from learning. I need something structured and I get so much from the involvement with other learned people with ideas.

"The world is becoming so much more complicated, and there's so much more to learn," she said.

"It's just incredible."

Do you have an idea for a story?

Email conor.burke@apned.com.au



Get the news delivered straight to your inbox

Receive the top stories in our weekly newsletter [SIGN UP NOW](#)

Tagged with: [AGEING](#) [MURDOCH UNIVERSITY](#)

ONE COMMENT

Jeannie Nicholson

May 21, 2021 at 11:44 pm

What an amazing forward thinking person!

[Reply](#)

LEAVE A COMMENT

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *