

ENRICHING SENIOR LIVES

Writing a love letter to my community

As CEO of Lions Gate, my days are consumed with the care of our residents. The decisions I make directly impact their health and safety, and nothing is more important to me than the welfare of these 500 dear people. As I sit down to write this article, I'm not sure where we will be in the fight against this pandemic even a week from now, let alone a month or a year from today. To say we are navigating in uncharted waters is an understatement, and I wondered what I could add to the conversation that others have not already touched on in the 24/7 news cycle we all seem glued to. With pen in hand, my intention was to write a love letter to my community—to tell them how fiercely proud of them I am of their resilience, how genuinely touched I am at their day-to-day kindness, and how truly awed I am in their ability to put the greater good before their own wants and needs. But instead of a love letter, I found myself creating a checklist for myself...a checklist of small things I hope to accomplish each day to remind me that this too shall pass. My hope is our community, our country, and our world as a whole will come out of this life-altering event even stronger in its friendships and faith.

TO DO LIST FOR PANDEMIC PERSONAL GROWTH

Gratitude

While news broadcasts may seem grim, there is always something to be grateful for—a hot meal, a good book, or a phone call from family. We know from research that a daily gratitude practice is good for us, helping us reduce stress, get better sleep, and stay healthier. I have to admit that my days have been a bit too frenetic recently to include time for a gratitude journal entry. But I wash my hands at least 30x a day now (www.cdc.gov > handwashing > when-how-handwashing), so as I lather up I try to take that moment to focus on being grateful. I think how grateful I am for all of our staff at Lions Gate caring for all of our residents. I think about the hourly workers in grocery stores and pharmacies helping restock the stores with food and necessities, putting themselves out there so that the rest of us can shelter in place. I think about everyone from first responders to hospital staffs to sanitation workers collecting our trash. Where would we be without all of them? And who would we be if we didn't thank each and every one of them with our whole heart the

next time we see any of them in person?

Patience

Being quarantined in your apartment or home is by no means the worst thing that can happen to you, but spending 24/7 with any companion in close quarters can try your patience. The meditation app on my phone is coming in handy when I need to take a deep breath, and it even helps me drift off to sleep when my mind is racing with anxious thoughts. Here are four free meditation apps to try in these worrisome times:

- **Calm:** There are 16 free meditation sequences available on the app, some lasting only 3 minutes and others lasting up to half an hour.

- **Aura:** Every day, you get a new 3-minute meditation called a “Mindful Moment.” The app will ask your age and how you're feeling and provide a new personalized meditation.

- **Stop, Breathe & Think:** This app provides a guided tutorial so that you can really understand just what meditation is and how it will benefit you. It focuses on compassion, sleep, depression, and anxiety.

- **Insight Timer:** With over 4,000 guided meditations from many teachers, you get to pick and choose which one feels best for you at any given moment in time. You're sure to find one on a topic you're interested in, on everything from nature to self-compassion.

Connection

I am amazed at the novel ways people are coming together as they maintain social distancing. Whether it is a virtual birthday party through Skype or a virtual book club over Zoom, people are reconnecting in new and different ways that make me smile.

- **Want to play a virtual game of checkers with your grandchild?** You can do it via www.247checkers.com.

- **Want to have a virtual watch party with your besties?** If you have Google Chrome, there's a feature called Netflix Party that allows you to stream a show at the same time as your friends. Then you can host a conference call to talk about it.

- **Want to have a group video chat?** The HouseParty app (available for free in the App store) can offer you and up to eight of your closest friends a video and screen sharing experi-

ence. It'll be like the Brady Bunch checkerboard, but with you and your family in the starring roles!

Imagination

The effects of social distancing have left many of us feeling stir-crazy, but just because we can't leave home doesn't mean we can't travel the world. Now you can “walk” through some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions like The Met and The American Museum of Natural History, then go for a “ride” on Disney's new Frozen roller-coaster or tap into live footage of pandas playing at the zoo!

- **The Louvre:** Enjoy online tours of three famous exhibits, including Egyptian Antiquities at www.louvre.fr

- **Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History:** Take a 360-degree room-by-room tour of every exhibit in the museum at www.naturalhistory2.si.edu

- **The Vatican Museum:** The Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's Basilica, and Raphael's Room are just some of the sites you can see on the Vatican's virtual tour at www.museivaticani.va

- **Metropolitan Museum of Art:** Though the Met Gala was cancelled this year, you can still have a peek at The Costume Institute Conversation Lab, which is one of the institution's 26 online exhibits at www.artandculture.google.com

- **Atlanta Zoo:** The Georgia Zoo keeps a “panda cam” livestream on its website at www.zooatlanta.org

- **San Diego Zoo:** With what may be the most live cam options, this zoo lets you switch between koalas, polar bears, and tigers in one sitting at www.kids.sandiegozoo.org

- **National Aquarium:** Take a floor-by-floor tour of the famous aquarium at www.aqua.org

- **Walt Disney World:** You can take virtual tours of the Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, and Epcot at www.disneyparks.disney.go.com

- **Disney Attractions:** Go to YouTube for unofficial videos of rides like Frozen Ever After, Fantasmic!, and Splash Mountain.

Curiosity

I have always said that you're never too old to learn. And while social distancing has shut down in-person classes and performances, the internet provides an unlimited smorgasbord

of new things to learn and do:

- **Stream a class:** Right now there are plenty of companies who are streaming classes for a wide range of interests—cooking classes (www.instructables.com), exercise classes (www.elderly-macademy.com), guitar lessons (www.justinguitar.com), and yoga classes (www.doyogawithme.com).

- **Want to enjoy the opera?** The Metropolitan Opera has extended its free streaming series of encore “Live in HD” presentations. Each day a different encore presentation is available on the Met website (www.metopera.org).

- **Great Courses Plus** has a ton of videos on YouTube discussing everything from “Quantum Mechanics and Alternate Worlds” to “The Geopolitics of Space: Past, Present, Future.”

- **You can enroll in Yale's ultra-popular “The Science of Well-Being” class** for free right now, designed to increase your own happiness and build more productive habits (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>).

Happiness

As CEO of Jewish Senior Housing and Healthcare Service, one of my greatest joys is the uniqueness of my workplace. I literally work in a place that hundreds of people call home. Friends share meals together, dogs are leisurely walked across the grounds, children stop in to visit with grandparents, and couples take a quiet moment to enjoy the sunset on a balcony. It's a truly wonderful place to live, and a lovely atmosphere to work in. So I started to wonder...does living in a place that makes you happy impact your health and wellbeing?

Turns out, the answer is a resounding YES!

Research shows that 33%-50% of individual happiness is determined by genetics. That means 50%+ of individual happiness can be attributed to life events and life experience, including the people we interact with, the activities we engage in, and the place we live in. The community you choose sets the foundation for socialization opportunities, meaning you're only as happy as the community that you live in.

The Mather Institute Age Well Study found that residents that live in a Life Plan Community rate the six dimensions of wellness—emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual—higher than those that live in the community at large. Life Plan

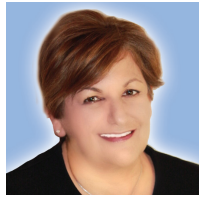
Community residents have a higher satisfaction with life, a better reported mood, and feel more optimistic. They report feeling less lonely, and had much higher social interaction. The big takeaway from this study is that seniors who choose to live in a Life Plan Community lead healthier lifestyles and have a decreased risk of disease and injury than if they choose to live alone in a private residence.

So when I want to check the “happiness” box for myself, I just double down on my efforts to make Lions Gate all that it can be, because I know that the better this community is, the happier and healthier all of the residents will be for it.

So that's my “To Do” list—6 small items that mean so much. I hope all who read this walk away with one new idea that they can put into action for themselves today. Write a letter to an old friend. Play a board game with your quarantine buddy. Bake a batch of cookies, and treat yourself to a Facetime call with your grandchild over cookies and milk. Don't let the day go by without telling someone you love them. I look forward to the day that the entire Lions Gate community as well as our Dubin House, Geshel House, and Saltzman House residents can come together again for Shabbat services, standing shoulder to shoulder, voices strong, reciting our blessings of gratitude, peace, and good health. Stay safe and healthy, and may you all find peace in the solitude.

In light of the current COVID-19 restrictions, Lions Gate is not currently open for personal tours. However, it would be our pleasure to step you through a virtual tour, and we'd be happy to talk to you about the many ways Lions Gate would be a good fit for you. Call Donna at (856) 679-4682 or go online to set up an appointment at DCoonley@lionsgateccrc.org. We'd love to share with you all the amenities Lions Gate has to offer!

Sources: “When and How to Wash Your Hands,” cdc.gov; “4 Free Meditation Apps to Bring Out the Best You,” complete-homespa.com; “30 Amazing Virtual Tours of Museums, Zoos, and Theme Parks to Watch Now” goodhousekeeping.com; “Happy People, Happy Neighborhood: Happiness and Sense of Community Among Florida Residents,” bebr.ufl.edu; The Age Well Study, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging. ▲ slove@lionsgateccrc.org



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