

## ENRICHING SENIOR LIVES

### Continue to experience the joy to be found in 'firsts'

There is nothing like the wow of experiencing a "first."

Remember the exhilaration you felt the first time you ever jumped off the diving board, drove a car, or flew on an airplane? Isn't it a joy watching a baby experience their first bite of birthday cake? Do you remember the nerves and excitement on the first day in a new school, new job, or moving to a new house? There are so many "firsts" in life that are truly breathtaking, like holding your baby for the first time. It's a shame that all of these "firsts" are crammed into the first half of your life.

Or are they?

I recently stumbled across a quote that truly resonates with me: "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." —Neale Donald Walsch

Isn't that an interesting way to look at new experiences? When you're feeling hesitant, or unsure, or even afraid of trying something new, instead of giving in to that fear and pulling back, ask yourself what would happen if you pushed ahead, left your comfort zone, and jumped in with both feet. According to Walsch, your life would EXPAND. Even if trying something new was a colossal failure and you hated it, what's the worst that could happen? You pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and chalk it up to a great learning experience where you put yourself out there and really swung for the fences. Chasing those "firsts" in life is an intriguing roadmap to expanding your perspective on the world and where you fit into it.

I'm really inspired by the idea that life BEGINS at the end of your comfort zone. That means that at ANY age there's still new things to experience as a "first," if only we push ourselves out of our comfort zone

to give them a try. Now that's empowering!

So let me make the case to all who are reading this article, but especially to seniors reading this article, why not challenge yourself to try new things and continue to experience "firsts,"

no matter what your age. Psychologists say that those who pursue new experiences are the ones who say they find their life truly fulfilling and satisfying. In study after study, the people who seek out new activities and experiences are reported to be happier, healthier, and more positive.

As the CEO of Lions Gate, I take those findings to heart, and try to implement them in our community every day. Our seniors can tell you firsthand that in their 70s, 80s, 90s, and even 100s, they still have a long list of first experiences they would like to check off their bucket list, and Lions Gate is happy to help facilitate that. Our Life Plan community emphasizes a vibrant, active lifestyle, and for those that want to try new things and meet new people, every day is a new opportunity to experience a "first."

"Before residents move to Lions Gate, many of them are spending time alone in their empty houses," said Meredith Becker, Lions Gate COO. "They fill their days, and look forward to their children visiting them. As soon as they move in here, suddenly they have a whole calendar of activities to look forward to. They still look forward to their children visiting them, but now the time flies by between visits because they are taking new classes, making new friends, discovering new hobbies, going to new places, and

changing old habits."

"I think being open to changing old habits is the key to experiencing new 'firsts,'" said Tom Devinney, Lions Gate director of sales and marketing. "When I take people on a tour of our campus, I always stop by

the Fitness Center and the pool. So many people tell me they don't exercise anymore, so they really wouldn't use these features in the community. I encourage them to talk to a resident who might be on the station-

ary bike at that moment, or who has just come out of the pool. Within five minutes, that visitor is looking at the Fitness Center and the pool with fresh eyes, because of a resident who said, 'I was just like you, and didn't exercise regularly. But once I got here, I tried the Body, Mind & Soul exercise class. I liked it so much that I met with Dave, the Fitness Center director, and he got me to try the water fitness class at the pool. I even go to his ping pong club sometimes, and that's a great workout. I hadn't played ping pong in 50 years, but we get to laughing so much every time we play that I can't wait to come back for the next game.' So in that short five minute conversation, a visitor has heard from a resident who told them about experiencing three 'firsts'—exercising for the first time in a long time, trying new classes, and joining a club. You suddenly realize that experiencing the joy of a 'first' doesn't mean you have to jump out of an airplane. It means you just have to pick up a ping pong paddle, and suddenly you've met a new friend across the table. Just changing one old habit suddenly opens up

all of these new doors. It's this domino effect. The new experiences just start rolling in one after the other."

"I couldn't agree more," said Lisa Goldwasser, director of philanthropy at Lions Gate. "Whenever I stop into the dining room, one of the residents will wave me over and say, 'Lisa, you have to try this new dessert. I tried it for the first time when they had it at the Taste of Lions Gate, and we all loved it so much they added it to the menu.' For residents who want to experience a 'first,' all they have to do is go to the Taste of Lions Gate gathering each month, where the chef previews new recipes. After the residents taste test it, if enough of them give it a thumbs up, it gets added to the monthly menu. I bet no resident was ever part of a food tasting panel before they moved to Lions Gate. It's fun!"

"It's easy to try new things at Lions Gate," said Kim Clemons, Lions Gate program director. "We pack the calendar with plenty of different classes, concerts, day trips, and restaurant outings, so you can experience new ideas, new music, new travel, and new foods any day of the week. But there's also all of the clubs to join. You can be part of the resident Book Club or Short Story Club, and enjoy the wow of reading a piece of great literature for the first time. You can take an art class in our Art Studio, and learn how to paint for the first time. Or maybe you already paint in water colors, and you want to learn how to paint in oils for the first time. You can join our Shpielers Drama Group, and try your hand at acting for the first time. Even our religious education classes with the rabbi can foster new ways of understanding old texts. There are so many ways to try new

things here at Lions Gate, and experience the joy of 'firsts.'"

"I think the most fun 'first' is when a resident goes to our Salon and tells the stylist to give them a whole new look," said Sandy Kushner, administrative assistant at Lions Gate. "They just call the Salon for an appointment, and an hour later with their hair and nails done, they feel like a whole new person. Their smile says it all."

So as I wrap up this rumination on the joys of experiencing "firsts," I wanted to share my own recent experience with "firsts." I always like to go to the monthly Men's Chat & Chew gathering where the guys get together, grab some lunch, and join in a discussion with whatever speaker is doing a presentation that day. A new resident came up to me after the last Men's Chat & Chew, and said, "I haven't been out with just the guys in a very long time. Thanks for reminding me that lunch with the guys is something I didn't know I was missing, but now I'm really looking forward to the next one."

I'm so proud to work in a community that is able to facilitate so many "firsts" for people. When I see residents walking down to dinner and enjoying a meal with new people who will soon become their new friends, it makes me realize the power of "firsts" to expand our lives. I hope you'll all seize the day, and experience a "first" for yourself this week. *Carpé diem!*

Want to learn more? We'll meet with you in whatever way you're most comfortable—an in-person tour, a FaceTime call with a virtual tour, a one-on-one meeting at your home, or a Zoom chat.

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