Presented by RACHEL KAIL

A 3-Year Effort: How a Global Pandemic, the Death of a Queen, and Bananagrams Shaped My Study of Aging

18th Annual Show Me Summit on Aging & Health - September 2023

First off. Thank you.

Give Me FIVE FACTS

1. What was the official month and day that the WHO announced there was a global pandemic in 2020?
2. What is a pack of male lions called?
3. Who is considered the father of Positive Psychology?
4. What year was Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom coronated?
5. What eye disease sparked the development of “Big Letter” Bananagrams?
But, seriously, the reality of studying gerontology in the middle of a pandemic was heart-breaking.

In 2020, 81% of COVID-19 deaths occurred among those age 65 and over.

- Most COVID-19 deaths in people aged 65 and over occurred in health care settings, nursing homes or long-term care facilities.
- COVID-19 mortality increased with age.
- Age-adjusted COVID-19 death rates were higher for men than women across the board.
My initial curiosity in selecting the course was to explore how positive psychology and gerontology might intersect. The pandemic gave me a chance to see this interplay in action.

Positive psychology is the scientific study of human strengths and virtues.

The Well-Being Theory considers positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement as related to our ability to thrive in life.

What idea can I come up with to help my older people get through this period of time?
FEEDBACK after 6 wks

“What a delight to stay so vividly connected to the grandson’s lives! - to appreciate how they are growing right before our eyes... We look forward to receiving our Grand-o-Gram each night, Anticipation is good!” - Ed Kail

“G-o-G’s have been a lifeline to a sense of well-being at the end of a day throughout this whole nightmare. Details have always been so important to me. When I see the overview of the boys’ days, I always laugh about how we ask kids, “How was your day?” And they inevitably answer “Fine.” The problem with that for me was always that I was HUNGRY for details, ANY and ALL details. What you give as a gift each night are the DETAILS! And in the most uplifting way, set to music, and narrated by the voices I long to hear. It is the most beautiful, happy way to end the day... in such a treacherous, unnerving time!” - Mary Sharp

“Looking forward to things is half the pleasure of them.”

- From Anne of Green Gables written by Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942), Canadian author

Grand-o-grams reinforced the value of ANTICIPATION and GRATITUDE in our lives.

Make something up.

Choreograph positive anticipation in the lives of your older people.

This will elicit positive emotions and cultivate gratitude.
Experiencing **GRATITUDE** has so many positive outcomes that it is pretty well considered the poster child of positive psychology at this point.

**BENEFITS of GRATITUDE**

Positive emotions, vitality, optimism, hope, satisfaction with life, more empathy, patience, ability to share, forgive, and give to others, less depression, more perceived meaning in life, stronger relationships, and higher psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being.

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**A Quick Exercise**

8 Reasons to Embrace an "Attitude of Gratitude"
- Promotes savoring
- Improves ability to cope with stress and trauma
- Encourages moral behavior
- Bolsters self-worth
- Builds social bonds
- Inhibits invidious comparisons
- Overrides negative emotions
- Thwarts hedonic adaptation

The death of the Queen put the whole country in a state of reflection.
The Procession of the Queen’s Coffin Along the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, Scotland

September 12, 2022

St. Giles’ Cathedral

Palace of Holyroodhouse

A Day Steeped in Ancient Tradition for a New King

A Day Steeped in Ancient Tradition for a New King
Sally Clark traveled by train to Edinburgh with her mother, Veronica.

"My Mum’s first experience of watching TV was seeing the Queen’s coronation at a friend’s flat in Edinburgh when she was a little girl."

[from an e-mail correspondence]

Veronica was 7 years old at that time - in 1953.

**A Quick Exercise**

**PERSPECTIVE-TAKING**

is the ability to see a situation or circumstance from the vantage point of another, imagining that person's point of view, experience, beliefs and feelings (which is where empathy kicks in).
“We were really lucky because one of the stewards came and spoke to us after we’d been queuing for a while and she offered to take us and other people who were in wheelchairs to join the accessible queue near the National Museum for Scotland. It was a huge help and we were so grateful to be able to go into the Cathedral to say our goodbyes to the Queen. We found it very emotional being there and seeing her coffin.”

- an e-mail excerpt from Sally Clark on Sept. 16, 2022
It's one thing to learn something about someone. It's quite another to do something with what you have learned.

Honor the old through your SELFLESS ACTIONS.

This is the step just beyond perspective-taking.

Who needs a "roll of film" in your life?

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING + SELFLESS ACTION
At the age of 76, Abe Nathanson invented Bananagrams (2005).
They are working to help those who experience a loss of vision.

What about those experiencing **a loss of words**?

**BANANAGRAMS**

Watch out for **ASSUMPTIONS**.

And if we are going to make ‘em, let’s assume **the best**.

Be open. Curious. Optimistic.

Explore. Experiment. Try.

“Allow yourself to go and do it wrong.”

- Darren Hardy from The Compound Effect
Because this is how we learn.

And this is how we begin to stop underestimating others as well as ourselves.

“A One of the unique things about the human brain is that it can do only what it thinks it can do. The minute you say, ‘My memory isn’t what it used to be’ or ‘I can’t remember a thing today,’ you are actually training your brain to live up to your diminished expectations. Low expectations mean low results…”


…the first rule of super brain is that your brain is always eavesdropping on your thoughts. As it listens, it learns. If you teach it about limitation, your brain will become limited. But what if you do the opposite? What if you teach your brain to be unlimited?” (p.16)


How will you choose to develop your skills to better use your instrument?
The creation of an At-A-Glance profile allowed Louise to REFLECT on her life… and positioned others to care for her better.

Given Name: Wilhelmina Louise Woody

Care Plan

Partial At-A-Glance Written after Transcribing a Semi-Structured Audio-Recorded Interview

Partial At-A-Glance

Pipher shares this quote from Alex Haley:

"The death of an old person is like the burning of a library."

Final At-A-Glance after Transcribing a Semi-Structured Audio-Recorded Interview AND Reviewing Details with Daughter Judy

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Cohen presents a new paradigm of aging with 4 developmental phases in the second half of life: "Summing Up," is Phase III.

The olders rely on the youngers to listen. To ask questions. To affirm a life well-lived.

**REFLECTION**

guides an older person through the crucial developmental phase in aging of Summing Up.

AT-A-GLANCE is a tool that reinforces:

- **Legacy** – as the Keepers of Culture (suggested by Dr. Cohen)
- **Generativity** – putting something of value into the next generation
- **Self-esteem** – when a sense of worth and identity are fading as roles have shifted
- **Preparation** – knowing life story details may help with future individualized care
- **Connectivity** – feeling a caring relationship knowing someone is asking and listening

**SET YOUR STAMP. MAKE YOUR MARK.**

**ASSUMPTIONS + REFLECTION**

What are you doing to build **anticipation** in the lives of your old people?
What practice do you have in place in your life to experience gratitude?

How will you use the concept of perspective-taking to improve your relationships at work and at home?

What selfless action step will you take to enrich the life of an older person in need?

How will you exercise your brain to avoid negative assumptions about yourself and others?

Who will you help with reflection and how will you capture the details shared?

LIFELONG LEARNING (n.)
the ongoing, self-initiated pursuit of knowledge for personal development.
"The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know."
- Albert Einstein

POP QUIZ ANSWERS

MARCH 11, 2020

COALITION

MARTIN SELIGMAN
1. "For those of us who aren’t yet old, instead of viewing ourselves as fundamentally different from older people, it’s helpful to think of ourselves as older people in training.”

2. “In this light, your negative age beliefs can be recast as a prejudice against your future self.”

Identifying as an OLD PERSON IN TRAINING keeps us mindful.

We stay awake to the concept of our future selves and present for the older people who need our respect now.
“The richest lives are led by those who are most fully immersed in the work of caring for others.”

- Dr. Bill Thomas (founder of the Eden Alternative and author of Life Worth Living)