

**LMH Alumni Bulletin**  
**Staying Joyful by Maggy Pigott (April 2020)**

***'It's totally fine to talk to inanimate objects and animals. It's when they start talking back that you have to worry.'*** I'm not sure I've anything better to offer. However, having written *'How to Age Joyfully'*, I'm delighted to have been asked for a few words about staying joyful in these difficult times. For some that will be hard, for a few impossible. But I hope what follows may help, as research and evidence shows most people can help themselves become happier and healthier, whatever their age or circumstances.

***'Happiness is a state of activity'*** Aristotle.

**Move.** Physical activity helps health and wellbeing. We need to keep active, in nature if possible. But, if stuck inside and able to exercise, look for the wide variety of reputable online classes. We need both strength training (which includes Pilates, Tai Chi or yoga) and aerobic exercise; look at [sportengland.org](http://sportengland.org) for providers, including [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk), and Joe Wicks, the Body Coach's, You Tube workouts. Or try my choice - dance classes. Other sources are fitness related DVDs, or, for those 60 up, the book *'Sod Sitting, Get Moving'* by Professor Sir Muir Gray and Diana Moran is excellent. Build activity into normal life, for example, walking whilst on the phone or exercising in your kitchen waiting for the kettle to boil. If sitting, it's important to get up and move for a couple of minutes every half-hour, so set your alarm but don't walk to the biscuit tin! Physical activity can reduce stress, depression and anxiety, improve sleep and increase well-being, so *'Just Do It!'*

***'To get the full value of joy you must have somebody to divide it with'*** Mark Twain.

**Connect.** Having friends and family we can count on is key to health and well-being. Lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Whilst face-to-face contact is limited, Face Time, Skype, WhatsApp, etc can almost substitute. For groups (and virtual parties), Zoom video conferencing is fantastic and easy to use. Telephone calls, letters, messaging, Facebook or Twitter can provide practical support, as well as reducing loneliness, raising morale, and entertaining us. Avoid overdosing on the news. It will not promote good mental health, particularly now.

***'If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal'*** Albert Einstein.

**Purpose and Growth.** A reason for being, or *'ikigai'*, as the Japanese call it, improves both physical and mental health. Advice for lockdown is to structure your week. A daily routine can make a positive difference to how good we feel, but don't be too ambitious with your goals. (My de-cluttering goal will outlive the virus). Ensure any routine includes fun, laughter and relaxation. There's so much to inspire and entertain us in books, podcasts, videos, films, online; for example, for online theatre, dance and opera, look at companies' websites or subscribe to [digitaltheatre.com](http://digitaltheatre.com) or [marquee.tv](http://marquee.tv).

Learning new things is great for the brain and the Internet can teach us a new activity or skill, maybe another language, an instrument or creative pursuit.

Then there's the world of online (mostly free) learning from top universities through MOOC providers such as edX (which includes Oxford) and Future Learn, or the Open University, mybluprint.com for crafts, LinkedIn Learning for business and technology - and You Tube for almost anything.

***'When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love'*** Marcus Aurelius.

**Be Positive and Grateful.** Your attitude to life has a significant effect on your health and wellbeing so cultivate optimism and gratitude for what you have. Focus on the joys of the here and now - music, a walk in the sun or getting an online delivery slot - not what you're missing. Meditation has proven physical and mental health benefits, including helping to reduce anxiety, and Apps exist (such as Headspace or Calm). Keeping a gratitude journal, recording three things per day you are grateful for, however small, can help.

***'Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves'*** J M Barrie.

**Give.** Research has shown receivers are not the only beneficiaries - givers become happier, more fulfilled and thankful. Now there is so much we can do, even if housebound, such as becoming a NHS Volunteer Responder, joining a Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK group, donating to struggling food banks and other charities, or telephoning and running errands for an isolated neighbour.

Mahatma Gandhi said ***'The future depends on what you do today'*** and (being positive) I believe we may emerge from this pandemic a kinder, better world. Until then, stay well and stay joyful!

***'How to Age Joyfully: Eight Steps for a Happier, Fuller Life'***  
by Maggy Pigott CBE. Summersdale Publishers Ltd (2019).