

# Personal Mission Statement and Goals

## FINISHING STRONG:

### Creating a Fulfilling and Meaningful Life as I Face Mortality

By Chris Palmer  
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I have one chance at life, so I must have an accurate map and compass to help me lead a life of purpose, joy, and meaning with the fewest possible regrets.

The purpose of this document is to be that map and compass. It includes my personal mission statement (my “true north”) and goals.

Although the level of detail in this document may be unusual, it encapsulates the totality of my life. It reflects who I am and who I want to be.

Getting these goals out of my head and capturing them on paper declutters my mind and gives me peace. As productivity expert David Allen says, “Your mind is for having ideas, not holding them.”

I review and update this document frequently and use it to plan each day.

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#### **My personal mission statement**

As I approach the end of my days on this earth, I appreciate *I’ve had a good life and have much for which to be grateful*. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. wrote, “Alas for those who never sing, but die with all their music in them!” I had the chance to “sing.” I worked hard and gave life my best shot. *I recognize I’ve been lucky and privileged*, enjoying unfair and unearned social advantages over others because I’m white, heterosexual, and male.

*I agree with whoever said that the purpose of life is a life of purpose*. Living purposefully improves the world and benefits others while helping me feel fulfilled. Therefore, I embrace a purpose-driven life, not a comfort-driven life.

*I find new ways to give my life meaning and purpose.* Raising Kimmie, Tina, and Jen gave my life purpose for decades; it still does, but to a lesser extent now that they are independent adults and need me less. My primary identities as father, filmmaker, and professor have diminished.

*I nurture new identities.* While I still focus on my family and my role as a husband, father, and grandfather, I am also building my identity as an author, speaker, community member, volunteer, health advocate, aging advocate, death and dying educator, and end-of-life activist.

*As I face mortality, I find joy in designing the meaning and purpose of the last phase of my life.* My responsibility is to find my path and live my own unique life.

*My goal is what MIT's Peter Senge calls "personal mastery."* I clarify the things that matter deeply to me and live my life in the service of my highest aspirations.

*I spend my time on what matters to me.* I am what I spend my time on. In historian Will Durant's formulation, I become what I repeatedly do. Heraclitus wrote, "Day by day, what you choose, what you think, and what you do is who you become." Author Annie Dillard wrote, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

*New York Times* columnist David Brooks distinguishes "eulogy virtues" from "resume virtues." Moving from "resume virtues" to "eulogy virtues" means moving from activities focused on the self to activities focused on others.

*I work for the greater good.* I give my life meaning and fulfillment by contributing to matters more significant than the self and more enduring than my life. William James said, "The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it."

*I set and achieve ambitious goals and am highly active, energetic, and productive.* I design and create a new life with Gail that makes me grateful, purposeful, and excited to be alive. I align my daily activities with my values and goals. I find and emulate role models flourishing in their end game despite deteriorating strength and other physical limitations.

*I give my life significance by devoting myself to challenging and worthy tasks.* As a result, I have something worth living for—what the Japanese call *ikigai*, which is linked to finding meaning and being optimistic.

*I welcome feeling challenged and outside my comfort zone, especially for a good cause I care about.* Working at the edge of my current capacity might be stressful, but that is how I learn, grow, and discover what I am capable of.

*I do not fear setbacks or failures.* As psychologist Carol Dweck (the creator of the mindset concept) points out, mistakes help build character and intelligence. I savor difficulties, and I seek out and embrace challenges.

*I adopt a growth mindset and seek an abundance of growth experiences.* Growth experiences give my life significance and meaning and are the keys to a fulfilled life and a life of learning. T.S. Eliot wrote, “Old men ought to be explorers.”

*If I live well, I will always do something hard.* Philosopher and activist Bertrand Russell said, “When striving ceases, so does life.” And Nietzsche believed that embracing difficulty is essential for a fulfilling life. He famously asserted, “What does not kill me makes me stronger.” Goethe said, “If you want to make life easy, make it hard.”

*I do hard things.* Psychologist Angela Duckworth recommends that everyone do at least one hard thing daily. Hard things include being a hospice volunteer, being vulnerable, writing books, standing on my hands, drawing, and playing the piano.

*I live each day with intention.* I create a life of depth, meaning, and community. I make a difference.

*In Adams Grant’s formulation, I am a “giver,” not a “taker.”* I benefit and help other people. I strive to make the world a better place. I am benevolent, farsighted, and generous.

*I optimize my life around growth, challenge, giving, and generosity.* I do not prioritize the pursuit of leisure, gratification, enjoyment, and comfort. As noted on the next page, my core values are *love, learning, service, trust, gratitude, and diligence.*

*I am creating a meaningful legacy that will survive me and be my gift to the future I will not see.* I want “my memory to be for a blessing”—a beautiful Jewish expression. I want to leave more than just money. I will ripple into the future as my parents have rippled through me. (Rippling is psychiatrist Irvin Yalom’s word for passing on parts of ourselves to others. Yalom says it helps to reduce the dread of death.)

*I undertake activities that strengthen my relationships with others, especially with Gail, family, friends, and neighbors.* I nurture camaraderie and goodwill. I “catch people doing things right” rather than focusing on mistakes and errors.

*I cut out all nonessentials from my life and everything of little consequence.* I minimize my use of social media, which can be toxic and dystopian. I practice “digital minimalism,” as described in Professor Cal Newport’s book. I do not blast my free hours into time confetti and prevent myself from learning new skills and taking on big projects. Instead, I have time for high-quality activities, including reading, writing, conversing with friends, and learning to dance and play tennis.

*I pursue a reverse bucket list.* I jettison obligations, possessions, and relationships that don't advance my life goals.

*I acknowledge that I am a beginner in many areas of life.* I relish the role of being a student and lifelong learner. Scientist and author Isaac Asimov said, "The day you stop learning is the day you begin decaying." I seek mentors and coaches to help me achieve my goals.

*I am open to taking advice and learning from others.* I seek feedback and accept criticism. I know that "feedback is the breakfast of champions." I understand that the best way to learn is to teach.

*I appreciate the distinction between "doing" and "being."* I relish watching a bird, admiring a flower, and enjoying the moment.

*I take multiple micro-actions toward my goals every day, seven days a week.* Through consistent daily action, I make significant progress. Change is achieved through hundreds of tiny steps.

*I live a life of purposeful action.* When congruent with specific and inspiring life goals, action leads to a meaningful, accomplished, and fulfilling life. Ben Franklin said, "Little strokes fell great oaks." The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote: "The heights by great men reached and kept/Were not attained by sudden flight,/But they, while their companions slept,/Were toiling upward in the night." And Robert H. Schuler wrote, "Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation."

### **Core values**

I live by values fundamental to an honorable, fulfilling, and joyful life. **My core values are love, learning, service, trust, gratitude, and diligence.** My other values include *courage, hard work, empathy, kindness, justice, integrity, honesty, patience, self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, fairness, generosity, wisdom, temperance, and tenacity.*

These values are timeless, self-evident, self-validating, enduring, foundational, and universal. I align my life with my values and use them to guide my daily actions.

In living by these values, I consistently foster the following 24 strengths identified by psychologist Martin Seligman:

1. *Wisdom and knowledge:* curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, social intelligence, and perspective.
2. *Courage:* valor, perseverance, and integrity.
3. *Humanity and love:* kindness and loving.

4. *Justice*: citizenship, fairness, and leadership.
5. *Temperance*: self-control, prudence, and humility.
6. *Transcendence*: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor, and zest.

I pursue the above values and strengths because they are deeply meaningful. I do my utmost to make my life congruent with them.

### **Daily routine**

I keep to the following daily schedule:

- 11 pm: Go to bed.
- 8:30 am: Get up, stretch, and respond to important emails.
- 9 am to noon. Deep work (take on my most challenging tasks because I'm most alert in the morning. Focus single-mindedly on them without distraction.)
- Noon to 2 pm: Exercise for one hour and play tennis (and swim in the summer).
- 2 pm to 3 pm: Eat (high-fiber cereal, blueberries, raspberries, flaxseed, nuts, etc.) and read the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.
- 3 pm to 4 pm: Write in my gratitude journal, play the piano and sing, juggle, draw, meditate, study humor, study words, make phone calls, and process emails.
- 4 pm to 4:30 pm: Eat lightly (tomatoes, kale, spinach, lentils, black beans, peas, carrots, broccoli, cabbage, onion, etc.)
- 4:30 pm to 7 pm: Zoom calls with grandkids, reading, and making dinner.
- 7 pm to 9 pm: Eat a light dinner with Gail (including an orange, pear, plum, apple, and banana). Start a multi-hour fast (see note below regarding intermittent fasting).
- 9 to 10:30 pm: Write and read.
- 10:30 pm to 11 pm: Review my mission and goals (this document) and plan the next day in detail.

Re intermittent fasting: For some years now, I have moved my breakfast later and later in the day to get my day off to a better and more productive, satisfying, and fulfilling start. There is a name for this—intermittent fasting. Most people do intermittent fasting to lose weight, which is irrelevant because I'm already thin. I eat breakfast late (usually at about 2 pm) because I dislike getting up and spending significant time cooking, eating, and cleaning up breakfast while listening to the news. All this does is slow me down (food in my stomach tends to dull me) and unsettle me if the news is disturbing. I am at my highest alertness and mental acuity in the morning, so I want to devote that time to working on my highest-priority projects without being slowed down or distracted. This makes my mornings much more meaningful, productive, and fulfilling. It also means that when I eventually eat my breakfast, I feel I've earned it and can enjoy it. I eat mindfully and slowly as I read the NYT and WP. There is a term for this approach to life—"essentialism," which means focusing solely on what is essential and eschewing wasteful and shallow distractions like social media rabbit holes and watching the news on television. So, for me, intermittent fasting is a lifestyle choice. It helps me focus on what's important to me.

## Goals

I have organized my goals into *four core categories*: **community, giving back, health, and growth**. I recommend that others include a fifth core category: “financial.” I don’t include “financial” in my goals because Gail and I are financially secure, and I have little interest in money.

I could have selected other ways to view the totality of my life. For example, by *roles* (husband, father, grandfather, writer, speaker, etc.); by *life domains* (work, home, community, self, etc.); by *mission* (to love, to leave a legacy, to laugh, to learn, and to live); or by *Cal Newport’s “buckets”* (community, constitution, craft, contemplation, and celebration). They all work equally well and accomplish the same goal of finding a way to organize and examine my life in its entirety.

In the last phase of my life, I am comfortable organizing my life in the following way:

1. **Community** includes relationships, social life, a sense of belonging, and engagement in the community. My highest priority is Gail, Kim, Sujay, Tina, CJ, Jen, Chase, Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, Dylan, and Charlie. *My “community” goal is to be an engaged and loving family member and a warm and active community member.*
2. **Giving back** includes meaning, a sense of purpose, a legacy, volunteering, and contributing. Finding meaning is one of my most fundamental needs. My “giving back” goal is to live a life brimming with purpose, enthusiasm, and meaning *and to leave a legacy.*
3. **Health** includes diet, exercise, and lifestyle. *My “health” goal is to be in the best health possible and to invest significantly in personal development.*
4. **Growth** includes lifelong learning, new experiences, overcoming challenges, and adopting a growth mindset. *My “growth” goal is to embrace challenges and a growth mindset and to devote myself to lifelong learning.*

A healthy, balanced, fulfilling, energetic, and active life requires full engagement in all four overlapping goals. Many activities carry over across multiple areas. They are interrelated and synergistic. Not fulfilling my goals damages and reduces the quality and success of my life.

What follows is more detail on the above goals.

**1. Community goal: Be an engaged and loving family member and a warm and active community member**

My goals in the “community” core category relate to Gail, Kim, Tina, Jenny, Sujay, CJ, Chase, my nine grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, and a few good friends and neighbors.

***Be the best husband possible to Gail.*** Being a husband is one of the most important roles I have. I appreciate the love and joy I receive from Gail and do my utmost to return them in spades. I find ways to help Gail every day. I strive to make her happy, be a model husband, and nurture our marriage. I build my relationship with Gail *by not taking her for granted*. We do fun things together, including grandparenting, dancing, tennis, movies, theater, cooking, travel, drawing class, gardening, birdwatching, road trips, house renovations, and spending time with family and friends. I prepare for a time when I might need to devote myself full-time to caring for Gail.

*I'm lucky: I feel deeply cherished and loved by Gail and by my daughters and sons-in-law.* Victor Hugo wrote, “The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we are loved.” Likewise, Warren Buffett says his measure of success is: “Do the people you care about love you back?”

***I want to be the best father possible to Kim, Tina, and Jen and father-in-law to Sujay, CJ, and Chase, giving them constant love, encouragement, and support. I am always there for them, affirming them and assisting them. I spend time in Boulder helping Tina and her family and in Boise helping Jen and her family.***

Having to raise children responsibly had a huge impact on my life. Kim, Tina, Jenny (and, of course, Gail) remade me, and I am deeply grateful to them. I can thank them by being the best possible father to them and *doing my utmost to be an inspiring example*.

*One of the legacies Gail and I hope to leave is a strong family whose members love and care for each other, respect each other, laugh together, have fun together, grow together, and enjoy meaningful relationships with each other.*

***I aim to be the best grandfather possible to Kareena, Neal, JJ, Max, Sammy, Aiden, Connor, Dylan, and Charlie. I constantly seek to enrich their lives with exuberant love and affection*** and exciting projects and adventures. I introduce them to history, words, language, humor, science experiments, family stories, and everything I study and learn. I help them achieve great things and lead loving and fulfilled lives.

During the pandemic, I started writing to our grandchildren weekly (using snail mail), telling them inspiring stories, and sending them my humorous drawings. I will restart that project next year using email and make it a priority.

***Strengthen my bonds with my cousins, nephews and nieces, extended family, and Gail's family.*** Do what I can to end the estrangement between Tim's children.

***Strengthen my bonds with our Edgemoor/BMAV friends and neighbors.*** I want to invest in Edgemoor and the village instead of trying to be everywhere in the world. I want a sense of belonging, which can only come from social ties.

***Strengthen my bonds with a select group of friends*** (for example, by sending them a “toast” letter), including:

1. Dave and Pippa Andrews
2. Ben and Carol Beach
3. Nick and Julie Clark
4. John Coles
5. Nelson and Joan Cooney
6. Mike Cordes
7. Debbie Davenport
8. Reid Detchon
9. Roger DiSilvestro
10. Richard and Clifford Fountaine
11. Roy Gamse
12. Barry and Susan Gorman
13. Elizabeth Haile
14. Tom and Claudia Henteleff
15. Steve Judson (and Andy)
16. Dick Jung
17. Steve King
18. Alec Klatchko and Jessica
19. Karl and Sarah Klontz
20. Diane MacEachern
21. Jane McGuire (and Rob)
22. Bob Metzler and Mary Lu
23. Huda and Andy Montemarano
24. David Moulton and Francie
25. Gary and Andrea Mullins
26. Dave Nathan
27. Charlie Openchowski and AnneMarie
28. Chris Palmer (my cousin in Wales)
29. Tom and Jeanne Parker
30. Chat Reynders
31. Stu Sessions and Beth Morrison
32. Bob and Anne Shaw
33. Tim and Luvia Sniffen
34. Jane Stanley
35. Patti Steckler and Phiroz
36. Tom and Pat Sugrue
37. Dennis Sullivan and Marnie
38. Steph and Steve Sutton



- 39. Grant Thompson
- 40. Kent Wagner
- 41. Phil Warburg
- 42. Bob and Alice Wipfler
- 43. Rae Woods and Randolph Shingler

This list does not include people I've never met but who I work closely with, like the language enthusiasts Liesl Johnson and Mardy Grothe.

***Honor the fact that relationships are not just vital but are everything.*** I treasure the family members and friends who bear witness to my life (as I bear witness to theirs) and want to invest in them. I want to feel deeply connected, make genuine and authentic contact, and *seek first to understand and then to be understood.*

*I build relationships with other people, especially those closest to me, by being trustworthy and sincere.* I do this by small kindnesses and courtesies, keeping promises, making offers, clarifying and honoring expectations, and displaying integrity and loyalty. I do these things unconditionally and sincerely, *expecting nothing in return.* I observe and draw attention to what people are doing right and praise them with specificity.

*When I have a problem with somebody, I focus on how I am contributing to that problem and what I am doing to help create it.* Problems are opportunities to build relationships with people faster than usual.

*I work on developing the skill and habit of empathy.* When I listen to people, I tend to interpret their words and feelings to fit my own opinions and experiences—as if I know the inner terrain of the people when, in fact, I don't. I recognize this impulse and resist it. I listen to people's unspoken concerns without making judgments or giving advice. I place myself within other people's frames of reference to experience their feelings as they do. I try to understand the other person's point of view deeply. *I do my best to express the other person's point of view better than they can.*

*I integrate the distinction between "opinions" and "grounded assessments" into my communications with people.* When I offer opinions, *I clarify that they are just opinions.* *If possible, I form grounded assessments.* Unlike opinions, grounded assessments are confined to a specified domain, can be supported by factual evidence, and are based on clear and articulated standards. They can generate new possibilities for people and lead to action (i.e., a request, an offer, or a promise).

***Other goals in the "community" core category include:***

1. ***"Toast" letters:*** Write letters of gratitude and appreciation to friends and family members who have helped, inspired, and supported me during my life. Letters like these are also called "legacy" or "last" letters (see page 19) or sometimes "eulogies for the living." I've written about 60 "toast" letters so far. Doing them gives me significant delight, and I receive beautiful responses.

2. *Innovative gifts*: Create innovative gifts for Gail and the family for birthdays and holidays. For example, a few years ago, I created a novel gift project for my birthday in which I give cash to family members so they, in turn, can give that cash to deserving others. I now do that every August 25. Every Christmas, I do a similar thing where family members select worthy nonprofits for me to support in their name.
3. *The village*: Be active and engaged in BMAV events, such as the Men’s Lunch, the Happy Hour, and leading the Aging Well SIG (see page 14).
4. *Community-building*: Host parties and events at our home for our neighbors, for Aging Well SIG members, for the BMAV Board, and for Montgomery Hospice fundraising events.
5. *Gratitude journal*: Keep a gratitude journal (more on this under “Health” below).
6. *Family traditions*: With Gail, nurture our many family traditions.
7. *Emergency plans*: With Gail and the family, update our Family Emergency Plan (done).
8. *Family vacations*: With Gail, plan memorable family vacations.
9. *My website*: Keep my website, [www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com](http://www.ChrisPalmerOnline.com), updated with help from Jenny.

**Actions:**

- Focus on Gail.
- Become skilled at telling stories and anecdotes.
- Set up lunches with friends.
- Plan Christmas gifts starting in the summer.

**2. Giving back goal: Live a life brimming with purpose, enthusiasm, and meaning, and leave a legacy**

My goals in the “giving back” core category relate to writing books, teaching, giving workshops and talks, using humor, serving on the board of outstanding nonprofit organizations, being a hospice volunteer, leading BMAV’s Aging SIG, and serving as president of MFFED.

**Write memorable books.** These books are among the principal closing acts of my professional career. My first two published books were on wildlife filmmaking (*Shooting in the Wild* in 2010 and *Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker* in 2015). They were followed by *Raise Your Kids to Succeed: What Every Parent Should Know* in 2017 and *Now What, Grad? Your Path to Success After College (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)* in 2018. (Rowman &

Littlefield published the 1st Edition in 2016.) I wrote *College Teaching at Its Best: Inspiring Students to be Enthusiastic, Lifelong Learners* in 2019, and *Finding Meaning and Success: Living a Fulfilled and Productive Life* in 2021. Bloomsbury is my current publisher. Bethesda Communications Group, in 2018, published *Love, Dad*, a 700-page book of my letters to my daughters; and in 2021, BCG published *Open Heart*, describing my open-heart surgery (written with Tina).

Books in the works include:

1. *Achieving a Good Death: A Practical Guide to the End of Life*. Pub date October 1, 2024.
2. *Humor, A Skill for Life: Why It Is Vital for Learning and Teaching*. I signed the contract with R&L on July 1, 2022. Deliver the manuscript by October 31, 2025.
3. *Science experiments and other games that grandparents and caregivers can play with kids*. I signed a contract with R&L on December 20, 2018. Deliver the manuscript on December 30, 2026. Or convert to a BCG project. Or integrate it into a book about being an outstanding grandfather or into my autobiography or letters to grandkids.
4. My autobiography (for my grandchildren). Look through my accumulated material and decide how to move forward. Publish with BCG. Or write letters to grandkids weekly and incorporate autobiography into those letters (story followed by life lesson.) Talk to Bloomsbury about a book, "Letters to my Grandchildren."

Enlist help on the above books from key advisors, including Gail, Kim, Tina, Jen, Grant Thompson, Diane MacEachern, Steve King, and Roger DiSilvestro.

***I continue teaching, striving to be an inspiring and life-changing teacher. I encourage, support, and challenge my students and audiences and relentlessly work to improve my teaching skills.***

***Give pro bono talks and workshops.*** Give pro bono talks and workshops on various topics, including how to live a meaningful and successful life, aging well, achieving a good death, living well to die well, medical aid-in-dying, decluttering and death cleaning, completing advance directives, writing memoirs, composing legacy letters and ethical wills, funeral planning, green ways of body disposition, hospice care, and making wildlife films.

1. Gave a talk on *Whales* to BMAV on November 8, 2018.
2. Gave lecture on wildlife filmmaking at Live & Learn Bethesda (Bev Amsterdam) on 3/4/19.
3. Gave a 3-part success class for BMAV at the library on April 16, 23, and 30, 2019.
4. Gave lecture at Leisure World (Rosalind Kipping) on May 5, 2019.
5. Gave a workshop at The Writer's Center (Laura Spencer) on memoir-writing on May 16-30, 2019.
6. Gave a talk on success to the Greater North Bethesda Village (Michele Alexander) at Davis Library on June 1, 2019.
7. Gave presentation on networking to Grassroots Organization for the Well-Being of Seniors (GROWS) (Christina Green) on September 5, 2019.

8. Gave workshops at The Writer's Center on memoir-writing on Sept 18, Sept 25, and Oct 2, 2019.
9. Gave talk for BMAV on wildlife filmmaking at library on September 22, 2019.
10. Gave a talk on wildlife filmmaking at Asbury Methodist Village (Pam Parmer) on Oct 24, 2019.
11. Gave lecture on wildlife filmmaking to the Women's Club of Chevy Chase (Jane Boynton) on November 20, 2019.
12. Gave a talk via Zoom on my books to BMAV Book Club on April 14, 2020.
13. Gave my 3-part success workshop for BMAV at the library on April 15, 22, and 29, 2020, from 6 pm to 8 pm. *It was unfortunately postponed because of the pandemic.*
14. Gave talk (via Zoom) to the Little Falls Village (Lisa Rosenthal, Lisa Owen) on "How to Age with Vitality, Dignity, and Humor and Live Your Life with No Regrets" on October 28, 2020.
15. Gave talk (via Zoom) to the Northwest Neighbors Village (Judie Fine and Stephanie Chong) on "How to Age with Vitality, Dignity, and Humor" on December 1, 2020.
16. Gave talk to the Bethesda Chevy Chase Rotary Club on wildlife filmmaking (Lisa Friedman) on December 8, 2020.
17. Gave lecture (via Zoom) to OASIS (Janice Pliner and Fran Raab) on wildlife filmmaking on December 10, 2020.
18. Gave talk (via Zoom) to CLL at Leisure World on aging well (JoAnn Gelman) on Jan 14, 2021.
19. Gave lecture on how to age successfully to the Women's Club of Chevy Chase (Jane Boynton) on March 17, 2021.
20. Gave a talk on aging well at Asbury Methodist Village (Pam Parmer) on April 1, 2021.
21. Gave talk (via Zoom) on aging well to Senior Planet Montgomery County (Inez Noelin and Fiona Adams) on April 28, 2021.
22. Gave a 3-part success class (via Zoom) to BMAV and the Bethesda Library on September 14, 21, and 27, 2021, from 6:30 pm to 8 pm.
23. Gave talk (via Zoom) on aging well to White Oak Senior Center (Inez Noelin and TeAnna Abraham-Smith) on Thursday, September 30, 2021.
24. Gave a 3-part memoir class (via Zoom) to BMAV on October 6, 13, and 20, 2021, from 8 to 9 pm.
25. Gave a talk (via Zoom) on my new success book to Senior Planet Montgomery County (at invitation of Inez Noelin and Fiona Adams) on October 13, 2021.
26. Gave a talk on my success book via Zoom to the NightOwls at the Women's Club of Chevy Chase (Veena Kutler) on Thursday, October 14, 2021, at 7 pm.
27. Gave a 3-part memoir class (via Zoom) to TWC (Laura Spencer) on October 19, 26, and November 2, 2021, from 7 pm to 8:30 pm.
28. Gave a talk to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning) at Leisure World (JoAnn Gelman, John Feldmann, Fred re PR) on my success book via Zoom on Thursday, October 28, 2021, at 7 pm.
29. Gave a talk on my success book via Zoom to Bradley Hills Village (Betsy Carrier, Kate Smith, Melissa Crown) at 2:30 pm on Thursday, November 4, 2021.
30. Gave a talk via Zoom to BMAV (Elizabeth Haile) on "aging well" at 2 pm on Monday, November 8, 2021.
31. Gave a talk on aging well via Zoom to Sibley Senior Association (SSA) (Honora Precourt and Marti Bailey) at 3 pm on Tues, Nov 9, 2021.
32. Gave a talk about my recent book FMS (via Zoom) to BMAV Book Club (Jane Boynton) at 7 pm on Tuesday, November 9, 2021.
33. Gave a talk to KFNV (King Farm Neighborhood Village) (Judy Niner, Lisa Friedman, Reda Sheinberg, Teresa Anderson) on my book FMS via Zoom on Wed, November 10, 2021, at 4 pm.
34. Gave a talk on aging well via Zoom to Brooke Grove Retirement Village (Susan Phillips 301-260-2392) on Tuesday, November 30, 2021, at 2 pm.
35. Gave a talk via Zoom on my success book to Little Falls Village (Lisa Owen) on Wed, January 26, 2022, at 1 pm (to 2:30).
36. Gave a talk to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning) at Leisure World (JoAnn Gelman, John Feldmann, Fred re PR) on wildlife filmmaking via Zoom on Tuesday, February 15, 2022, at 7 pm.
37. Gave a talk on FMS book via Zoom to the Sibley Senior Association (SSA) (Honora Precourt and Marti Bailey) on Thursday, March 10, 2022, at 11 am.
38. Gave a talk on aging well via Zoom to the "over 55 group" at B'nai Israel Congregation (Harriet Fredman, Marcia Levine, and Rachel Hyman) on Thursday, March 10, 2022, at 1 pm.

39. Gave a talk by Zoom on how to write a memoir to the Women's Club of Chevy Chase (Jane Boynton and Melissa Watts) on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at 1 pm.
40. Gave a talk to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning) at Leisure World (JoAnn Gelman, Judy Frumpkin, John Feldmann, Fred Shapiro re PR) on memoir-writing via Zoom on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, at 2 pm.
41. Gave a talk via Zoom on aging well to North Bethesda Village (Caroline Levenson 301-655-7913) on Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at 2 pm.
42. Gave a talk via Zoom on wildlife filmmaking to Katherine Owen's 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at Episcopal on Tuesday, May 31, 2022 at 10:15 am and again at 11 am.
43. Gave a talk by Zoom to WAVE (Mary Jo Deering) about BMAV's Aging Well SIG on Monday, June 13, 2022, at 1 pm (and I did it again on January 23, 2023).
44. Gave a talk in-person on my success book to the Wednesday Morning Group (WMG) at 10 am on Wed, June 15, 2022 (Veena Kutler, Emily Hofman [emilyjh777@verizon.net](mailto:emilyjh777@verizon.net), Laurie Wilner [lewilner@gmail.com](mailto:lewilner@gmail.com)), and Julie Frye at Cedar Lane, Unitarian Church.
45. Gave an interactive talk on aging well to Andy Brown, David Diskin, and Mary Shwartz's "wise aging class" at Temple Micah at 10 am on Friday, June 17, 2022.
46. Gave a 3-part success class (FMS book) by Zoom sponsored by SSA (Honora Precourt and Marti Bailey) and BMAV on (Wednesdays) September 14, 21, and 28, 2022, from 6:30 pm to 8 pm.
47. Gave a talk via Zoom on wildlife filmmaking to At Home in Alexandria (AHA) (Ruth Arnold, Julie Gentry, and Cele Garrett) on Friday, September 16, 2022.
48. Gave talk in-person on green burial to BMAV men's lunch at noon on Thurs, Feb 16, 2023.
49. Gave talk on writing memoirs via Zoom to Little Falls Village (Margaret Warker 301-320-3267, Doran Flowers) on Wednesday, February 22 from 1 pm to 2:30.
50. Gave talks to Aging Well group on hospice (2/26/23), on green burial (3/26/23), and on legacy letters (4/23/23).
51. Gave talk to Neal's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class at Westbrook on wildlife filmmaking on Tues, March 7, 2023 at 2:40 pm.
52. Gave three workshops via Zoom for WAVE (Mary Jo Deering) to help villages develop death and dying programs: Tues, March 14 at 3 pm, Thurs, May 4 at 3 pm, and Thurs, June 8 at 3 pm.
53. Gave a talk to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning) at Leisure World (JoAnn Gelman, Judy Frumpkin, John Feldmann, Fred Shapiro re PR) on my success book via Zoom on Friday, March 24, 2023 at 2 pm.
54. Gave a talk to JJ's 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class in Denver on wildlife filmmaking on Friday, April 14, 2023.
55. Gave a talk on aging with vitality via Zoom to Little Falls Village (Margaret Warker 301-320-3267, Doran Flowers), FHNN, and Suburban (Kate McGrail) on Wednesday, May 17, 2023 at 1 pm.
56. Gave a talk on "How to Declutter Your Home" via Zoom to Little Falls Village (Margaret Warker 301-320-3267, Doran Flowers) on Thursday, September 14, 2023, from 1 pm to 2:30 pm.
57. Gave a talk for Village to Village (VtV) and WAVE on death and dying programs in villages on Tuesday, October 3, 2023 via Zoom, at 1:15 to 2 pm.
58. Gave a talk in person to Cheverly Village on starting a death and dying village program (Laila Riazi, Clareen Heikal, Diane Lavoy) on Sunday, October 8, 2023, at 2 pm.
59. Gave talks to the Aging Well SIG on Sept 17, Oct 15, Nov 12, 2023, and throughout 2024.
60. Gave a 3-part success class via Zoom sponsored by SSA (Honora Precourt and Marti Bailey) and BMAV on (Wednesdays) November 1, 8, and 15, 2023, from 6:30 pm to 8 pm.
61. Gave a talk to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning) at Leisure World (JoAnn Gelman, John Feldmann, Fred Shapiro, Kathy Healy) on decluttering via Zoom on Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at 2 pm.
62. Gave a talk via Zoom to the Montgomery County Palliative Care and End of Life Coalition (Jackie Ogg 301-537-5627, Tina Purser Langley, Tashi, Claude Thomas) on funeral planning on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 9 am.
63. Gave an in-person talk for Reflection Park (Basil and Mona Eldadah, Pleasance, Meridith Bowers) on *Live Well to Die Well* on Sunday, February 4, 2024, at 2 pm.
64. Gave a talk via Zoom to the NE Village PDX (Teri McKenzie, village manager, Portland, OR, 503-479-7061) on *Live Well to Die Well* on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at 4 pm ET.

65. Gave a talk via Zoom to LFV (Margaret Warker, Doran Flowers) on “The Conversation” on Tuesday, February 27, 2024, at 2:30 pm.
66. Gave a talk via Zoom to LFV (Margaret Warker, Doran Flowers) on funeral planning on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 2:30 pm.
67. Gave a talk via Zoom to the Positive Aging Community (Steve Gurney) on my new book (*Achieving a Good Death*) on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, at noon.
68. Gave a talk via Zoom to ChevyChase@Home (Deborah Scherk, Cristen Sargent, Susan Hamburger) on Live Well to Die Well on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, at 1 pm.
69. Gave an in-person talk to Montgomery County Federation of Woman’s Club (MCFWC) (Terry Blank 573-353-7155) on “how to age well and succeed in life” at the Woman’s Club of Bethesda 5500 Sonoma Rd on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, at noon.
70. Gave an in-person talk to Friends Meeting of Washington (FMW) (Grant Thompson) on how to live a good life on Sunday, June 2, 2024, at 12:15 pm.
71. Gave a webinar via Zoom to CaringMatters (Leigh Bluestein and Allison Stearns) in a community education session on *Live Well to Die Well* on Thursday, June 6, 2024, at 10 am.
72. Did a podcast and interview with Michael Patterson on my book at 6 pm ET on Friday, August 30, 2024.
73. Gave a talk by Zoom to WAVE (Mary Jo Deering) about aging, death, and dying programs in villages and the FS Award on Wednesday, September 11, 2024, at 11 am.
74. Gave a webinar via Zoom to CaringMatters (Leigh Bluestein and Allison Stearns) in a community education session on death cleaning and decluttering on Thursday, September 19, 2024, at 10 am.
75. Gave a talk via Zoom for VtV (Barbara Sullivan, Bill Kincaid) on Thursday, Sept 26, 2024, on “End-of-Life Discussions: A Valuable Part of Vibrant Villages.”
76. Gave a 3-part success class via Zoom sponsored by SSA (Honora Precourt and Marti Bailey) and BMAV on (Thursdays) October 10, 17, and 24, 2024, from 6:30 pm to 8 pm.
77. Gave a talk (in person) at St. Columba’s (Susan Flanders) at 4201 Albermarle St, on Sunday, October 13, 2024, at 10:15 to 11:05 am on the book. Elizabeth Haile, Reid Detchon, Eric Cathcart.
78. Gave the opening address (in person) in Silver Spring on Tuesday, October 15, 2024, to WAVE (Mary Jo Deering, Elizabeth Haile, Wendy Zenker) to inspire attendees.
79. Gave a book launch stump talk (in person) at Starr and Fred Ezra’s house on Wednesday, October 16, 2024, at 3 pm, sponsored by BMAV (Elizabeth Haile).
80. Gave a talk for FCA (Sara, April, Phyllis) via Zoom on Tuesday, October 22, 2024, at 8 pm ET on my book.
81. Gave a talk via Zoom for the Center for Conscious Living and Dying (CCLD) on Wed, October 23, 2024, at 7 pm ET on my book. Postponed because of the devastation to Asheville from Hurricane Helene. Cynthia Phelps, Linda Solomon, [Courtney@cldd.community](mailto:Courtney@cldd.community). Reschedule in 2025. Dr. Aditi Sethi is founder and executive director of CCLD.
82. Gave a talk for Gail Rubin (505-363-7514) at the “Before I do New Mexico Festival” (beforeIdiefestivals.com) at 12:30 pm ET on Sunday, November 3, 2024, via Zoom on my book: “Planning for the Inevitable.” Postponed because of Nick’s funeral.
83. Gave talk to the Funeral Consumer Society of CO (Sue Mackey and Lea) on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, at 6 pm ET via Zoom on “Live Well to Die Well.” FCA affiliate.
84. Gave a talk via Zoom to Silver Spring Village (Tim Tutt, Doug Gaddis) on my book at 2 to 3:30 pm on Wednesday, November 13, 2024.
85. Gaive talk via Zoom to CLL (Center for Lifelong Learning at Leisure World) for JoAnn Gelman, Judy Frumkin, and Harriet Gordon on Wednesday, November 13, 2024, at 7 pm on my book.
86. Did an interview via Zoom on my new book with Steve Gurney (Positive Aging Community) at 11:30 am on Thursday, November 14, 2024.
87. Gave a talk to Hemlock Society of San Diego (Sarah Weinstein, Janet Hager) on how to write a legacy letter (ethical will) on Sunday, November 17, 2024 at 4:30 pm ET, and repeated it on Wed, Dec 11, 2024, at 7 pm ET.
88. Gave a talk in person for LFV (Margaret Warker) on “The Art of Aging Well and Dying Well,’ on Thursday, November 21, 2024, at 1 pm, at Little Falls Library.
89. Gave a 10-15 minute talk via Zoom at FEN’s “All Volunteers Meeting” at 2 pm ET on Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

90. Gave talk via Zoom on my book to Cambridge Neighbors (Alex Clarke and Jan) on Thurs, Dec 5, 2024, at 11 am.
91. Gave talk via Zoom to GW medical students (Misha, Janette, and Elissa Parker) on my book on Friday, January 10, 2025, at 2 pm.
92. Gave talk via Zoom to AHA (Cele Garrett, Alan Dinsmore, Veronica Ferris) on ethical wills on Thursday, January 16 at 10 am.
93. Give a talk on my book to Hemlock's (HSSD) book club (Christie Golomb and Sarah) on Thurs, January 23, 2025, at 6 pm ET.
94. Give a talk (via Zoom) to NNV, the Northwest Neighbors Village (Leslie Pace and Stephanie Chong) on my book on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, from 11 am to noon.
95. Do interview via Zoom with Sara Anguiano (619-240-6809, Bloomerang Network) on Tuesday, Feb 4, 2025 at 3 pm ET.
96. Give a talk in person on "Living well to die well" at the Keese School at Asbury Methodist Village (AMV) (Kate Harrison 301-275-9165, Jim Hathaway, Pam Parmer) on Thurs, Feb 13, 2025, at 7:30 pm. Arrive at 5:45 pm for dinner. Uber there. Bring books to sell.
97. Give talk in person on finding meaning and success to Kentlands Manor in Gaithersburg. Linda Sperling, 301-980-8868, will pick me up. Tues, Feb 18, 2025, at 11 am. Sell books
98. Give talk in person for Louise Lynn (301-742-2536) at the Westchester (4000 Cathedral Ave) on finding meaning and success. Sell books. Tuesday, Feb 18, 2025, at 7 pm. Down Mass Ave, pass AU, TR on Idaho, go 2 blocks to Cathedral, TL on Cathedral and see heavy gates on right.
99. Give talk in person for Linda Sperling (301-980-8868, CarePlus home health care) at Kensington Modena on Conn Ave, on Wed, Feb 19, 2025, at 7 pm. Sell books. Talk about finding meaning and success. Linda will pick me up.
100. Give keynote speech via Zoom on my book to FCA of Arizona (Linda Lewandowski 520-858-5447) on Sat, March 15, 2025, at 11 am (log on early at 10:15 am).
101. Give talk in person for Flavia Favali and her church group on Tuesday, March 18, 2025, at 11:30 am. Sell books. Talk about my book.
102. Give 3-part workshop via Zoom (on Wednesdays on May 7, 14, and 21, from 3 pm to 4:30 pm) on achieving a good death for Sibley Senior Association (SSA and Honora Precourt).
103. Give a talk via Zoom on my book to "Positive Passings" (Cathy Duke 404-374-3180) on Wed, May 28, 2025, at 7 pm.
104. Give talk via Zoom for Joe Sperling (301-980-8869, and Steve Gurney as MC) on achieving a good death. Senior Service Alliance (SSA) and the Positive Aging Community. Log on at 8:20 am. Event begins at 8:30 am and ends by 10 am on Wed, June 11, 2025.

***Spend 30 minutes a day absorbing and creating humorous material.*** While I no longer perform stand-up comedy, I use humor in my conversations, Zoom calls, talks, teaching, family journal, and the books I write (especially the book I am currently writing on humor and jokes). I honor and embrace humor as a significant part of my life.

Humor has a power and exhilaration that can accomplish extraordinary things, including bringing people closer together and teaching me to laugh at myself. It can also put challenges into perspective, deflate tense situations, and activate the immune system. Laughter is a fantastic phenomenon. I work daily to deepen my understanding of the value of humor and become a more competent observer of humor in everyday life.

***Serve on the Board of Montgomery Hospice and on the Executive Committee as Vice Chair.*** I joined the Board on June 1, 2019, and chair the Major Gifts & Philanthropy Board Committee. Elected to the Executive Committee in June 2022 and elected Vice Chair in July 2024. Work closely with Karen Miller, Justin Reaves, and Marlene Bradford.

***Serve as a hospice volunteer for Montgomery Hospice.*** I took the three-day training in September 2019. Work with Volunteer Manager Lindsay Norris.

***Serve on the Board of the Bethesda Metro Area Village.*** I joined the Board in January 2024. Work closely with Barbara Berish and Elizabeth Haile.

***Serve as leader of BMAV's Aging Well shared interest group (SIG).*** I founded this group in 2017. Hold monthly meetings of the Aging Well SIG at our home or via Zoom. Send a monthly e-newsletter to the group with insights, observations, and humor on aging (I've now written over 50 of these e-newsletters). Write reports on our discussions to spread the learning. Upcoming meetings are on February 23, March 23, April 20, May 18, September 21, October 19, and November 16.

***Fund and lead of the \$5,000 Finishing Strong Award at WAVE*** to incentivize villages to do more programs on aging, death, and dying. In 2023, I gave three workshops to WAVE villages on how to develop and create such programs. Work closely with Mary Jo Deering. Reach out to the three winners.

***Serve as vice president on the Board of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs (FCAME).*** Work closely with Barbara Blaylock, Rachel Bayard, Dimitrio Rizos, John Rizos, Trevor, Debra, and Vikki Zourzoukis.

***Serve on the Advisory Council of Maryland's Office of Cemetery Oversight (OCO).*** Work closely with the other consumer representatives, like David Zinner, and with the Executive Director Debbie Rappazzo.

***Serve as Vice President on the Board of Hemlock Society of San Diego.*** I joined in July 2024. Work closely with Faye Girsh, Janet Hager, PJ, Christie, Amber, and Pam.

***Serve on the Board of Final Exit Network.*** I joined in July 2024. Work closely with Brian Ruder, Lowrey Brown, Mary Ewert, Gary Wederspahn, Melanie Raine. Consider taking EGP training with Lowrey.



*Serve as President and Director of the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation.* Support Greg, Barb, Shaun, Janna, Kathy, and Tori. Hold weekly calls with Janna and Kathy, and chair the quarterly Board meetings.

*Other goals in the “giving back” core category include:*

- Write more children’s books with Tina (okeydokeybooks.com) on bullying, health, fitness, morality, and other topics.
- Actively support causes that align with my values and are important to me, including environmentalism, MAID, green burial, animal rights, and a whole-foods, plant-based, unprocessed diet. Financially support progressive political campaigns and help to stop the spread of fascism.

*Actions:*

- Review and update this PMS/goals document frequently and plan my day around it so I only focus on essentials and what really matters to me.

### **3. Health Goal: Be in the best health possible and invest significantly in personal development**

I’m using the word health in its broadest sense to include personal development, which is vital to enhancing my capacity to be an effective, giving, and vibrant person. I must take care of myself in order to have the capability to take care of others, including Gail, my family, friends, and neighbors.

*Exercise.* I exemplify peak vitality and outstanding health. My 60-minute daily exercise regimen (see my *Dad’s Exercise Book* for details) is focused on the five areas of *strength, endurance, flexibility, balance, and posture.*

I find ways not to plateau in my fitness level but to keep raising the bar on my fitness goals. I play tennis, swim, do handstands, sprint up and down the stairs, dance, garden, and juggle in addition to my daily exercise regimen. *Exercise is medicine.*

*Diet.* I continue eating an organic, whole-food, unprocessed, plant-based diet to avoid malnourishment and toxic food, fight climate disruption, and reduce animal cruelty. The standard American diet (SAD) is high in sugar, protein, and unhealthy fats—think hot dogs, hamburgers, French fries, and sugary drinks. It is sad indeed and highly inflammatory. It shortens lives, promotes disease, encourages cancers, is catastrophic for the planet’s health, exacerbates climate chaos, and causes unspeakable animal cruelty.

My diet continues to focus on blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, pomegranate seeds, flaxseed, nuts, cruciferous vegetables, tomatoes, carrots, kale, spinach, onion, broccoli, beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas, oranges, apples, and other anti-inflammatory “super” foods that fight cancer, heart disease, and other major health problems.

The SAD diet is typically overly refined and thus low in fiber. Vegetables, fruits, beans, and lentils are terrific sources of dietary fiber. Extensive epidemiological research has shown that a fiber-rich diet is vital for intestinal and heart health.

Multiple randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind control trials (the “gold standard”) have proven the effectiveness and health of an unprocessed plant-based diet. Pioneering researchers and advocates in this field include Dr. Dean Ornish, Dr. Michael Greger, Dr. Neal Barnard, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, and Dr. Colin Campbell. Rabbi Moses Maimonides wrote in 1190, “No disease that can be treated by diet should be treated with any other means.”

I won’t eat anything Little Granny (my father’s mother, born in 1890) wouldn’t recognize as food. (In doing this, I honor Little Granny’s beloved memory.) Thus, I continue to eat foods found in nature (in other words, fresh, unprocessed, and simple whole foods) that scientists widely recognize as nourishing and nutrient-dense. *Food is medicine.*

For decades, I maintained an aggressive prostate cancer treatment regimen through diet and exercise (and, in the process, reduced my risk for virtually every other age-related disease). Despite this, in August 2020, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer (the disease that killed my father and which I inherited from him), and I had a prostatectomy (surgical removal of my prostate gland) in January 2021 with Dr. Hwang at the Washington Hospital Center. The surgery was successful and I have fully recovered.

And five months later, I had open-heart surgery in June 2021 because of inherited heart disease from my mother. Dr. Christian Shults performed the surgery at the Washington Hospital Center. Again, I made a full recovery. See Tina’s and my book titled *Open Heart* for more details.

My decades-long healthy lifestyle and two recent surgeries decreases the chance of premature death and ironically increase the likelihood of a painful death by a chronic disease like congestive heart failure. Death by old age requires a strategy and plan. Leaving it to chance will likely result in prolonged suffering and painful over-medicalization. This concern explains why my discussion of death and dying below is so detailed.

*Sleep.* I get a minimum of 8 hours of sleep a night. Psychologist Angela Duckworth writes, “Sleep is a miracle drug with no side effects.” *Sleep is medicine.*

***In sum, through exercise, diet, and sleep (plus my purpose-driven life and all the love I receive from and give to my family, friends, and neighbors), I am a super-ager—*** someone in his 70s and 80s who has cognitive and physical function equal to that of people decades younger. My goal is to redefine what 85 looks like.

**Other goals in the “health” core category include:**

1. *Seek transcendent and awe-inspiring experiences (shared with Gail).* I accomplish this by reconnecting with nature and finding glimpses of the sublime. My goal is to connect to nature and to feel recharged and replenished by the wonders of the natural world. *I want to give myself the space for contemplation without thinking of time.* Poet William Blake wrote, “To see a world in a grain of sand/And a heaven in a wildflower/Hold infinity in the palm of your hand/And eternity in an hour.” And Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Many eyes go through the meadow, but few see the flowers in it.” I want to see the flowers. I will invite our precious grandchildren to join us! I want to make a cross-country road trip to see the American West, including Jackson Hole, the Tetons, and Yosemite. *I want to feel reverence—viscerally and profoundly—for the ineffable beauty that nature embodies.*
2. *I keep a daily gratitude journal,* not a diary of daily outward events, but a thoughtful chronicling of reflections and ruminations that seem important and for which I feel grateful. A journal is an *instrument of self-awareness* that can help me watch what I do so I can find out who I am. In addition, such a journal helps me think about and savor what is going well in my life (to offset my natural tendency to focus on what might be going wrong). Our brains, says psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman, have a natural catastrophic bent (for sound evolutionary reasons), but we need to spend more time dwelling on good events to be happier, more optimistic, and less depressed. I do that through my gratitude journal. Every Christmas, I give each family member a roughly 200-page bound book of the family gratitude journal for the year. I work with Gail on using the app Artifacts to photo and write about things (like my 65-year-old vocab book) that have precious memories.
3. *Listen to educational podcasts* while doing my daily exercises, especially Cal Newport and Sam Harris.
4. *Listen to books on tape* while driving, especially books on American history.
5. *Play the piano and sing daily.* Continue taking piano lessons (I need to find a new teacher) and teach my grandchildren what I’m learning. Write lyrics for songs like *Greensleeves*.
6. *Take weekly dancing lessons* at Bethesda Elementary on Mondays at 7 pm and learn to dance well with Gail. Invite friends (like Jessica and Alec) to join us. In a 1580 essay on aging, Michel de Montaigne wrote, “There is nothing more notable in Socrates than that he found time, when he was an old man, to learn music and dancing, and thought it time well spent.”
7. *Juggle balls every day.* Get good enough to entertain people and interject humor. Learn to juggle by overhand clawing and catching balls behind my back. Teach my grandchildren how to juggle.

8. *Do handstands every day.* My goal is to be able to do handstands at age 80. Handstands challenge my whole body, especially my core, shoulders, and balance. I enjoy the healthy rush of blood to my head, my legs stretched out gloriously above me, and deftly steadying myself with my hands. It is the epitome of freedom of movement.
9. *Play tennis several times a week (or even better, every day) throughout the year* and have weekly tennis lessons with Andy Orben and Jim Shepard. I want to become a more competitive tennis player. When I reach 85, my goal is to become a competitive tennis player for that age group. Playing tennis is a wonderful way to make new friends.
10. *Swim every day in the summer,* doing whole lengths underwater with one breath.
11. *Practice drawing daily* so I can do the many illustrations needed for my book on games and science experiments. Share my drawings with my grandchildren. Create a humorous birthday cartoon for family members.
12. *Learn to cook a variety of delicious plant-based meals.* I want to cook with my grandchildren so they can learn about healthy, unprocessed food. See my file on cooking. Focus on beans and lentils.
13. *Be a better gardener.* Work with Gail to grow lots of vegetables. Use our Tower Garden to grow vegetables with our grandchildren.
14. *Be a better birder.* With Gail, learn the names of birds and their lives by observing them in our garden. Learn all we can from David Moulton. Then, teach what we know to our grandchildren.
15. *Meditate daily* using Sam Harris's *Waking Up* app.

#### **4. Growth Goal: Embrace challenges and a growth mindset and devote myself to lifelong learning**

My goals in the “growth” core category include studying books on key topics, being organized to achieve meaning and fulfillment, creating a meaningful legacy, and preparing and planning for old age, dying, and death. I am committed to lifelong learning and improvement, thus continually opening new possibilities for myself and others.

*I actively study books for two or three hours daily and practice deep reading. I only read deeply meaningful books that I want to read repeatedly to uncover and learn their important messages. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “You become what you think about all day long.” I read biographies and autobiographies of people who have lived courageous, inspiring, and generous lives. I constantly improve and enrich my vocabulary and my ability to write.*

***Be organized for meaning and fulfillment.*** Reduce my worldly possessions and move toward minimalism and simplicity. Rigorously declutter and “death clean” my study and our house so I don’t unfairly dump that onerous work on my family when I die. Purge unimportant and out-of-date papers, files, and books. Keep my study organized so I can think, read, and write productively.

***Create a meaningful legacy*** that survives me and, as I noted earlier, will be my gift to the future I will not see. I want “my memory to be for a blessing.” I want to leave more than just money. I hope to “ripple” into the future and enlarge the lives of others who survive me. Psychologist Erik Erikson wrote, “I am what survives me.”

*I want to be remembered by my family, friends, and colleagues as a person* grounded in decency, simple goodness, infectious vitality, and inspiring enthusiasm; as someone with a lasting and wonderful marriage, a great sense of humor, and a strong work ethic; as a person who made his role and responsibilities as a father and grandfather one of his highest priorities; as a person who committed himself to learning and education and who pursued his goals with passion; and as a person who left the world a better place.

*As I think about my legacy, I focus on my non-financial assets, including love, wisdom, beliefs, stories, and values I want to pass on when I die.* An African proverb says, “When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground.” I want to minimize the loss.

*I have written a legacy letter and ethical will.* A legacy letter is a way to convey wisdom and love between the generations. It contains personal reflections, values, aspirations, and expressions of love. I want to say what is in my heart that might otherwise be left unsaid.

*My legacy letter and ethical will consists of the following:*

1. An “heirlooms” letter to the family dated March 31, 2020, on non-financial family assets. Tina and I have created a shared Google Drive to accompany that letter. We are collecting non-financial family assets, including books, letters, photos, stories, videos, and other heirlooms, as described in my March 31, 2020 letter to the family. That letter is a “Table of Contents” for the shared Google Drive. Please go to [drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com) and see the shared folder “Shearer-Palmer Family Essentials.” The March 31, 2020, letter (saved under “Legacy letter re nonfinancial assets”) is supplemented by a March 5, 2024 letter (saved under “Legacy letter re heirlooms March 5 2020”) describing a list of 38 heirlooms to be given to family members (or tossed if they don’t want them). That list of 38 heirlooms repeats many of the items described in the March 31, 2020, letter.
2. A five-page “goodbye” letter” (or “gratitude” letter) dated January 11, 2019, thanking Gail and my family in case I die suddenly and don’t have a chance to say goodbye in person. (“Death letter to family”). This is supported by my “toast” letters to family members, as mentioned on page 10, and a letter dated June 20, 2020, to Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny expressing why I feel so proud of them. (“Letter to KTJ Fathers Day June 20 2020”)

3. Books, journals, and letters to provide a loving and enduring gift—a legacy—to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. For example, my book *Finding Meaning and Success* was written with my grandchildren very much in mind.
4. A goodbye video (in development).
5. A 50-page book of family stories, my 120-page family history (*Mavis and Sydney John Palmer August 11, 1991*), our family mission statement, the 320-page book Gail and I wrote for Kim in 2017 on our lives (*Gail and Chris: Our Family Stories*), my 700-page book of letters to my Kim, Tina, and Jenny (*Love, Dad: Letters from a Father to his Daughters*, 2018), and many other items collected in the shared google drive.

The idea behind creating an ethical will and a meaningful legacy is to capture my essence and my vision for the future so that future generations (my heirs) can benefit from it. In this way, *I hope to live beyond my death (so to speak) and support my family even after I am gone.*

After I die, I hope to be considered a farsighted and wise ancestor. *My death does not end my responsibility to those I leave behind.* I want to be a light that shines through our family for generations. In short, *I will support my family after I have died.*

*You can find me in my daughters, grandchildren, and friends when I am no longer here.* Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin writes that Eleanor Roosevelt often quoted the lines, “They are not dead who live in lives they leave behind: In those whom they have blessed they live a life again.” In other words, after I die, I can live again in others by what I gave. To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die.

***Prepare and plan for old age.*** As a secular humanist, I need to find a meaning in life that is not annulled or destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me. If death means extinction and oblivion (which I believe it does), does life have any meaning? How do I not despair when I accept that I have a finite life?

*The answer is that I create something significant enough to make my life worthwhile.* I live a life that matters. I do more than survive. Death does not lead to nothingness, even though I concede that my life is a brief transition between two oblivions (or in Vladimir Nabokov’s phrasing in his autobiography, “a crack of light between two eternities of darkness.”)

*I fight stagnation.* At 76, I am officially old (what I would call young old age because I’m still vigorous). Old age does not have to be—as it is for many—depressing, boring, and lonely. Annie Dillard warned that “the surest sign of age is loneliness.” I will do my utmost to combat isolation, despair, and feelings of worthlessness.

*I retain a zest for life until I die.* I aim to age successfully and remain independent for as long as possible. Sadly, people over 65 watch nearly 50 hours of television on average per week. I am not one of them because my many challenging and exciting projects (outlined in this document) make watching TV for hours impossible.

*I set an example of successful aging to my daughters and friends by living to my full potential and not prematurely withering.* In a sense, I'm scouting the territory of "old age" for my daughters and sons-in-law to help them enter this new and forbidding land when it is their turn. I'm finding out what to expect and teaching those I love the wisest way to navigate the treacherous waters of elderhood.

*I fight marginalization.* Unlike in Japanese culture and Native American tribal communities, elders are not revered in Western culture. I fight ageism and the disrespect, invisibility, and marginalization usually afforded older people. I oppose the negative stereotypes that portray older people as useless, feeble, and contributing nothing.

*I retain some agency over aging, even as my body ages.* According to the Pew Charitable Trust, 25 percent of aging is genetic while 75 percent is environmental and behavioral. According to Professor Linda Fried of Columbia University, we now know that "at least half of the chronic health concerns of older age can be prevented." It is possible to be "younger" longer, thus increasing our "health spans."

*I am not afraid of aging, even though it is scary, and I know my horizons and interests will inevitably shrink.* But my decline is offset by the blossoming of others through my mentoring, teaching, and coaching.

*As I grow old, I engage in continual development, learning, growth, and discovery.* I am a role model for dealing competently and gracefully with the challenges of old age. I am not complacent, sluggish, or disengaged. Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote, "It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they get old; they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams."

*I study end-of-life issues.* I investigate death and dying and deepen my understanding of them. Bloomsbury will publish my book, *Achieving a Good Death*, on October 1, 2024.

*I realize that death is my constant companion—as it is for us all.* I let this awareness guide me to make the best use of my time and live life to the fullest every moment. Irvin Yalom wrote, "The way to value life, the way to feel compassion for others, the way to love anything with greater depth is to be aware that these experiences are destined to be lost." *Memento Mori*.

*There will come a time when the last living person who remembers me dies (likely one of my great-grandchildren).* Then, I will move from the "remembered dead" to the "truly dead." Dwelling on such a melancholy thought is futile. The better response is *to redouble my efforts to live a full life*. When I die, Little Granny (my father's mother, born in 1890) will become truly dead. No one alive will have any memories of her.

***Prepare and plan for my death.*** I am planning the end of my life in detail, working closely with Gail, so that the stress on Kim, Tina, and Jen (and Gail if she survives me) is minimized.

*I have written a four-page memo (dated April 2, 2020) entitled “In Case of My Death” to help Gail (and Kim, Tina, and Jenny) when I die. I also wrote a draft letter in June 2022 expressing my wish to get help dying when the time comes.*

One of my greatest gifts to my family will be to gently usher them through the process of my death *so it is a positive, loving, and inexpensive experience for them.*

*My goal is to set an example of how to have a good death. This goal imbues my life with meaning to the very end. I intend to face death with courage and dignity.*

*I want to die with few regrets, open loops, and loose ends. I will “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” with stoicism and courage, bringing cheer and comfort to those around me.*

*I always want to know the truth about my condition, treatment options, and the chance of success of treatments. I do not want to be deceived or misled.*

*My advance directive (or living will), supplemented with discussions I have (and will continue to have) with Gail, describes how I want my final days to unfold. Gail is my healthcare agent and will speak for me if I cannot. If Gail dies before I do, Kim, Tina, and Jen will be my healthcare agents.*

*The following are important to me as I near the end of my life: being able to talk with my family, being mentally alert and competent, preserving quality of life, having autonomy and independence, being comfortable and free of pain, leaving good memories for my family, dying quickly rather than lingering, and avoiding expensive care.*

*What is not important to me (indeed, is repugnant) is living as long as possible, regardless of quality of life. If the prognosis is grave, my physical state is dire, and there is little chance that I will ever regain mental or physical function, I want to be allowed to die peacefully. Being assigned to an ICU and hooked up to multiple machines would be worse than death for me. The pain, discomfort, isolation, lack of autonomy, and hopelessness would be unbearable.*

*The following are all anathema to me when I am close to the end: mechanical breathing and artificial ventilation, tracheotomy, CPR, artificial nutrition and hydration (through a nasogastric tube or a PEG tube), hospital intensive care, electroshocks to my heart, medications to stimulate heart function, dialysis, chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and surgery. I would include antibiotics in this list, but I am happy to leave that decision to Gail. She may decide a short trial period is warranted if it provides comfort care.*



*If I have an irreversible illness or intractable pain, I have the right to end my life in any way I choose—a right to death with dignity. I want a good death if I can no longer enjoy a good life. I want to extend my health span, not my life span. I support medical aid-in-dying (MAID) and want access to MAID medications (if legal), so I have the option of taking a lethal dose of medicine. I do not want my life prolonged artificially after it has ceased to be the life I want, as captured in this document.*

*If I'm in pain or am breathless or in any way uncomfortable, I want those symptoms relieved fast and vigorously with morphine, even if the treatment unintentionally advances the time of my death or even causes my death. With intense pain, I welcome palliative sedation and (as already noted) medical aid-in-dying.*

*I do not want life-sustaining interventions if I am permanently unconscious (i.e., in a coma) and terminally ill. By terminally ill, I mean having an incurable and irreversible illness likely to cause death within six months. I see no purpose in prolonging my dying if it is painful, miserable, and hopeless.*

*If I have lost all cognitive ability, I request that I not be spoon-fed. I do not want my life prolonged by artificial means (medicines, machines, CPR, tube feedings, etc.) if I'm bedridden or cannot smile, recognize and communicate with my family, swallow, bathe, or use the bathroom.*

*I don't want my family to suffer by watching me suffer. I do not want to be seen and remembered in a sad, pitiful state. I want to die before becoming a stranger to my family through the cruel ravages of old age.*

*Please make sure that my doctors and nurses know about the kind of person I was before getting sick and senile. For example, show them a photo of me doing handstands in my late 70s! And please protect me from well-meaning religious folk who want to convert me before I die.*

***How I want to die.*** *Before I get to the "waiting room for death," I'd like lots of visitors and to be surrounded by Gail, my daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I want my loved ones to make space to grieve and combine that with stories, roasting, and toasting. I want my death to release love. My death is not a tragedy. I didn't die young.*

*As I die, I would love to have family members tell me about their plans and their happy memories. I want photos of loved ones in my room near my bed. I would love to have my hand held and be talked to when possible, even if I don't seem to respond to the voice or touch of others. I want to be kept fresh and clean at all times, and I would like my lips and mouth kept moist to stop dryness.*

*I far prefer hospice care to hospitalization. I'd like my doctor to make a referral to hospice as soon as I am eligible. If I'm in hospital, I'd like a referral to palliative care at the earliest opportunity, even if undergoing curative treatment.*

*Casey House.* I'd love to die at home with hospice care, but I realize that at some point, this may impose too big a burden on my family. If that is the case, then I would be happy to spend my last days at Casey House (a beautiful inpatient facility with Montgomery Hospice [www.montgomeryhospice.org](http://www.montgomeryhospice.org)).

*If necessary, I will use MAID or VSED to die.* When there is no hope for recovery, my life is near an end, and I am no longer enjoying being alive, I will intentionally hasten my death by stopping all non-palliative medicines and using MAID (if legal) or VSED (voluntarily stopping eating and drinking). I will initiate VSED *before* I stop recognizing loved ones and cannot communicate.

VSED causes death by dehydration within 8 to 14 days. It is peaceful and causes little suffering when adequately supported by good oral care and pain-relieving analgesics. Its slowness also provides time for reflection, family interactions, and mourning. VSED is justified when the burdens of my life outweigh the benefits.

*I would rather end my life using VSED than suffer the despair of a lengthy stay trapped in an ICU on mechanical life support,* being overmedicalized and in pain, intubated, trached, given electric shocks for cardiac resuscitation, and wasting absurd amounts of money while feeling miserable and fearful. I want to avoid ICUs and nursing homes, which are often tantamount to torture.

*I plan to obtain a DNR (do-not-resuscitate) order (i.e., no CPR) and a MOLST (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) from my doctor.* DNR is also called DNAR (do-not-attempt-resuscitation) or AND (allow-natural-death). MOLST will support my advance directive. The difference between an advance directive (AD) and a MOLST is that an AD is a legal document, while a MOLST is a medical order. A MOLST provides a new tool for patients near the end of life to control their medical treatment better than advance directives alone, though both are important.

***In sum, I don't want my death to be over-medicalized.*** I do not want to endure the pain of futile medical procedures. *I want it driven by quality of life issues and palliative care* rather than invasive and painful medical care. I do not want my life extended by any medical interventions if my death from a terminal condition is imminent, if I am in a persistent vegetative state (PVS), or in an end-state incurable condition that will continue its course until death. *It is more important to enhance my quality of life if I'm seriously ill, even if it shortens my life.* My advance directive codifies these instructions. *If I become demented,* please follow the directions in my letter to the family on how I want to be treated under such circumstances. I do not want to survive the end stages of dementia.

***Prepare and plan for my immediate post-death.*** As already noted, I have written a four-page memo (dated April 2, 2020) entitled "In Case of My Death" to help Gail (and Kim, Tina, and Jenny) when I die.

I will prepare a draft obituary and my “death will”—details of my green burial and memorial service (done). Gail and I have already met with David Perry at Pumphreys to pre-plan what happens after one of us dies to minimize the burden on whoever is left.

It makes more sense to have my memorial service *before* I die while I am still cognitively functioning so I can thank people. This is called a “living funeral,” “living wake,” or “before death funeral.” Morrie Schwartz and Art Buchwald both held living funerals.

*I detest embalming.* I want to minimize expenses, I request *not* to be embalmed, and I want an inexpensive, biodegradable casket. I would be even happier with no casket and simply wrapped in a shroud.

*I will plan to dispose of my remains in as green a way as possible.* Gail and I are looking at Reflection Park, a new green burial ground opening in 2025 near Silver Spring. Flame cremation and conventional burial are absurdly polluting and carbon-intensive, and I do not want to use either.

Other newer options for disposing of my body in a green way are alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction (NOR or human composting). Both these methods are not as appealing as natural earth burial, but if the latter didn’t work out for any reason, then NOR or alkaline hydrolysis would be great.

***Other goals in the “growth” core category include:***

1. Deepen my knowledge of what makes a successful “retirement.”
2. Deepen my knowledge of death and dying issues.

***Actions:***

1. Read voraciously every day.
2. Work on getting my legacy organized and created. Continue creating my legacy letter and ethical will.
3. Update my January 11, 2019 “goodbye letter” (or “gratitude” letter) to my family.
4. Update my March 31, 2020 “heirlooms” letter (on non-financial family assets) and my March 5, 2024 “heirlooms” letter.
5. Update my April 2, 2020 memo, “In case of my death.”
6. Update my June 29, 2022 letter to my family (“Dying letter to family”) and June 8, 2022 letter to my doctor about how I want to be treated at the end of my life.
7. Update my Dec 7, 2022 draft letter re ending my life (“Death and dying draft note re ending my life”)
8. Draft my memorial service (done) and help Gail draft hers. Select music.
9. Draft my obituary and help Gail draft hers.
10. Update our wills and draft a financial power of attorney (done).
11. Make decisions on donating organs (done—I included this decision in my advance directive) and on giving my body to the Maryland Anatomy Board.
12. Research and visit Reflection Park.

13. Hold a pre-planning funeral meeting with funeral director David Perry at Pumphreys (done).

\* \* \* \* \*

I warmly and enthusiastically embrace all the goals in this document. I will be the best person I can be, so I can die feeling at peace and with few regrets.

I will end this goals document with a list of new project ideas that I'm mulling over:

### **New project ideas**

1. Give more pro bono lectures and talks at Leisure World, Asbury Village, OASIS, The Writer's Center (TWC), and villages like Little Falls Village.
2. Develop a workshop on how to successfully retire, age, and die. (Done)
3. Start a blog or podcast on retirement, aging, dying, and death.
4. Become a certified end-of-life doula.
5. Start a nonprofit to help people create good deaths and help them with their legacy letters and ethical wills. Or work with BMAV or WAVE in some way on this. Then, fund it with a significant donation. Gail and I have already started by committing \$5K to WAVE to support the Finishing Strong Award for villages (see page 15).
6. Get a tattoo on my chest over my heart saying, "No Code." Support this with a MOLST and DNR. ("Full code" status means "do everything possible to keep me alive," so "No Code" means the opposite: Let me die.)
7. Write poems about aging, dying, and death. Take a class at TWC.
8. Find a drawing class to do with Gail (so I can improve my humorous birthday cartoons for family members).
9. Create funny cartoons, building on my drawing and my humor.
10. Write a letter of advice to Kareena, who is entering her second decade and faces many challenges not of her own making. Along the same lines, send a weekly e-letter to all my grandchildren dispensing wisdom, encouragement, and stories.
11. Create a new nonprofit to combat entertainment that is toxic, reckless, harmful, and traumatizing to children. To their everlasting shame and disgrace, broadcasters incorporate terrifying violence and graphic sex in programs they know young children watch.

12. Study the American West and Native Americans. Visit key historical sites (e.g., the Battle of the Little Bighorn), especially now that Tina and Jenny live out west.
13. Explore the cottage three miles north of the White House where Abraham Lincoln spent his summers in 1862, 1863, and 1864. Explore Civil War forts and battlefields. Also, visit the D-Day beaches at Normandy.
14. Create a book club focused on biographies and autobiographies (for example, books about Ambrose Bierce and Oscar Wilde).
15. Create a village book club devoted to the Civil War.
16. Update my family history with the new material I've collected since I wrote my 120-page book in 1991.
17. Make living amends to my father (a living, breathing apology) for failing to tell him I love him. I will do this by setting an intention that whenever I love someone, I will tell them I love them.
18. Create lyrics to Erik Satie's *Gymnopedie* (done), and put the wolf credo to music.
19. Invest \$100K in Recomposition, run by Katrina Spade in Washington State.
20. Be an unpaid volunteer death celebrant helping families celebrate the lives of their dead loved ones.
21. Get more skilled at both tennis and dancing.
22. Take each grandchild on a big trip when they reach the age of 15.
23. Find others in BMAV or Edgemoor who listen to Sam Harris's *Waking Up* meditation app and create a small group to discuss Harris's thoughts on consciousness.
24. I need to talk to my daughters (and also put it in writing) about their inheritance and how it fits into my charitable giving requests. I want them to understand that they're not my only beneficiaries and that I intend to give major gifts to causes I care deeply about. Work with Gail on a letter to the family. I want to give Kimmie, Tina, and Jenny \$1 million each before I die.
25. Start giving precious things (like my personal vocabulary book) to family members.
26. Build water cremation and human composting facilities in Maryland.

27. Buy plots for Gail and me in the green burial ground Reflection Park, about five miles from us near Silver Spring.
28. Seek opportunities to feel more awe (see family journal January 8, 2023).
29. Sort through and organize my “cool dude” file. Make into a book for the family?
30. Endow a workshop or lecture program at BMAV, MHI, FEN, HSSD, FCA, and WAVE.