

So What Is on Your List?

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.

This question is not about your grocery list or your “TO DO” list. It is a list about you. It may be a list you have yet to make.

Let’s back up a little and first learn about Ruth’s story. She and her parents were in a concentration camp in Germany near the end of World War II. They suffered severe hardship until they were freed by the Allies in 1945. They were poor; they had no savings; they had no home. They had lost all contact with their relatives. Somehow Ruth’s parents found work and received help from different groups.

After they had recovered physically, mentally, and emotionally to some degree, the family made their way to the U.S. and settled in New York City. They worked hard and saved enough money to open a clothing store and a few years later, a clothing factory. Ruth worked long hours beside her parents but she was grateful. She was safe and free to live her life.

Ruth grew up, married and raised her daughter, Ellie. In September 2001, Ruth was in NYC when the World Trade Center was bombed. Everyone was shocked and traumatized by the loss of thousands of lives and injuries and the destruction of the World Trade Center. Ellie and her friends were dismayed and distressed by the scope of the event.

Ruth met with Ellie and her daughter’s friends a number of times to help them talk about their feelings. She wanted to support them and urged them to try to reestablish the pieces of their lives. Ruth remembered what her mother had done to help her after they had moved to New York City.

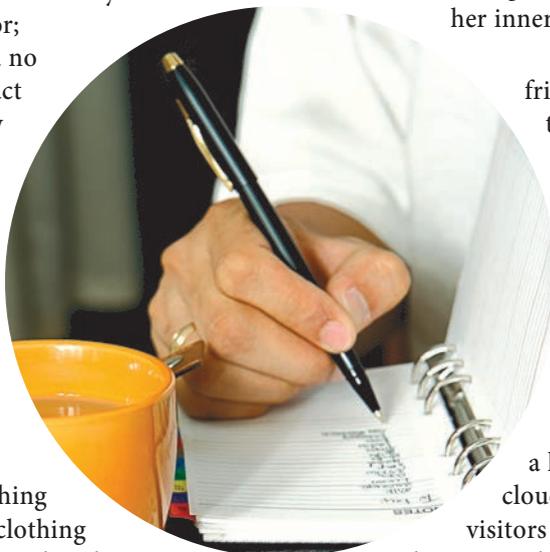
Ruth’s mother had asked Ruth to write on a sheet of paper her natural abilities and talents and the activities in her life that gave her pleasure. Ruth listed her love of reading and writing, her mathematical ability, her ability to connect with other people and much more. She listed gardening, walking in Central Park; listening to music as some of the activities that gave her pleasure and relaxation.

When Ruth had finished with her list, her mother said all that Ruth had listed could never be taken from her no matter what might happen in her life. Her mother opened a small wooden box and placed Ruth’s list in the box and gave it to Ruth for safe keeping. Over the years Ruth would look at the list and sometimes added more to it. The list gave Ruth a reference point and reminder of her inner resources.

When Ruth next met with Ellie and her friends, Ruth brought a tablet and urged the girls to create their own unique list of talents, abilities, and activities they enjoyed in their lives. She too told them that no matter what hardships might happen in their lives, they could always come back to their list to be reminded of some of their best qualities and the activities that gave them pleasure.

Ruth is in her seventies now living in a home for senior citizens under the dark cloud of COVID-19. The facility is closed to visitors and she has lost access to her daughter, her son-in-law, and her two grandchildren. Once again her life has been greatly impacted by an unexpected and potentially dangerous event. She knows this virus will eventually pass with the emerging vaccines and then she can be with her family again. In the mean time given her love of writing, Ruth is creating children’s stories for her grandchildren.

We are all living in challenging times with COVID-19. Our lives have changed in so many ways. Protection from COVID19 means isolation and separation for many of us from our families, our jobs, our friends, and our usual social activities. Some of us will have to move out of our residence and relocate. Some of us are going to food banks for food, and some of us are now dependent on unemployment checks. As a result, many of us are



CATHERINE NELSON, Ph.D., has a counseling practice in Bozeman with over 25 years of experience working with individuals and groups. She has taught at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a certified Pathwork Helper. She offers workshops on personal transformation and energy healing and is available for individual sessions. Call Catherine at (406) 585-8025 or send e-mail to cnhobbit@gmail.com.



depressed and worried about how to take care of our families. Many of us are frightened about our future security and livelihood.

You may want to make a list of your unique abilities and talents and some of the activities in your life that bring you pleasure. Take some time to create your list. Look at it and let it give you an awareness of your inner resources to help balance the many things in your life that are problematic. Store your list in a safe place even in a small box. Let it be a reminder that you have internal resources and natural abilities that will be with you now and in the years ahead. Bring pleasure into your life by finding some time for the activities you love. We must find ways to nourish our souls so that we can persist and keep on keeping on caring for those we love.

You could help your children by inviting them to each make a list of their abilities and talents and the

things they like to do that will give them pleasure. Children, especially young ones, often do not have the capacity to have self-reflection. They depend on loving adults to help them identify and recognize their unique abilities and talents. You might share your list with them to provide an example of how to make such a list. It could be a powerful project for everyone.

We are in the midst of challeng-

ing times filled with lots of unknowns. What we are able to do to survive will greatly depend on how well we each nourish our emotional and spiritual self. Somehow and in some way we all need to be with that which we love. When we take care of our personal needs, we are more able to take care of our loved ones. It is a balancing act.

So what is on your list? ■



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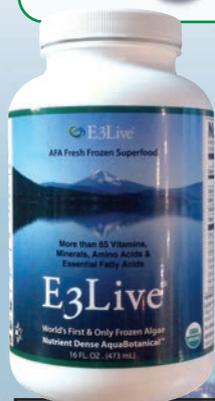
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