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## Downtown 3



Union Square Green Market

## APRIL

### Cultural events we'd recommend

- *Present Laughter*, Noel Coward's revival with Kevin Kline
- *Gently Down the Stream* at the Public with Harvey Fierstein
- *If I Forget* at the Roundabout
- HD movie versions of operas, usually on Saturday afternoons at 12:00, for which one must almost always obtain tickets well in advance

**The Fall Stop - Move Strong program**—about preventing and minimizing falls was discussed and those of us who'd taken the course previously recommended it strongly.

### Self-image and aging.

We discussed internalized ageism and how we can project an aura of youthfulness rather than weakness and neediness. Many shared their reactions to people giving us a seat on subway. One member stressed how important it is to congratulate yourself on your strengths, rather than complain about what you've lost (such as your sharp-as-a-tack memory—an all too common phenomenon).

Someone brought up the unfortunate fact that we seem to have become invisible no matter how carefully we groom ourselves or dress. But a positive is that our values change: many of us no longer care so much about looks and appearance. (Someone brought up plastic surgery; we agreed that it's neither right nor wrong, but something each woman must determine for herself.) Some of the mental and physical capacities of our younger years are gone, but we've also gained the proverbial "wisdom" which brings many of us mellowness and contentment, especially when we realize there aren't so many years ahead of us.

If the discussion yielded one conclusion it is that aging is tough but we have to accept it with grace and get as much as possible from each day. One member shared how volunteering with young people was helpful in her quest for daily fulfillment; another recommended involvement in "English for Action," a conversation program.

## Midtown East Afternoon



Ed Koch Bridge

## MARCH

**Is technology enabling “*Intimacy for the Avoidant?*”\*** Has technology changed your own relationships with friends and family? Is the change positive or negative?

### **Texting:**

Everyone’s young relatives text now, and hardly ever call. You have to use it to maintain your daily connection with them, but it is definitely not as good as a real conversation.

### **TV watching:**

A new habit for some of us is watching cable TV news, sometimes even during the day. We feel the need to keep up with latest events in Washington DC and then commiserate with anyone willing to listen. Others avoid TV news entirely and continue to read the actual *newspaper*. Streaming technology does enable us to view TV and movies via computer or tablet app. We can spend time with a friend and catch up with the “Masterpiece” episode later.

### **Facebook:**

Facebook used to be something only young people spent time on. Now women our age are learning how to use Facebook so they can post about issues they care about. TTN members started a very active “Civic Action” Facebook group.

### **E-mail:**

While e-mail is a necessary and timesaving “tool,” it can definitely be impersonal. Sending e-mails to a dozen women to arrange a face-to-face meeting is much more efficient than making individual phone calls. E-mailing instead of picking up the phone to say “Happy Birthday” is definitely not positive use of technology.

### **Telephones:**

Aggressive telemarketers/robo-callers make many of us reluctant to answer our phones. Caller ID is no longer very effective. But it’s frustrating when we really want to have a quick discussion with someone we know, and our call goes straight to voicemail. Telephoning –or using Facetime/Skype- is still the best way to maintain your connection with someone you care about.

\* *Intimacy for the Avoidant* by David Brooks appeared in the New York Times on October 7, 2016

## Upper East Side 4



Gracie Mansion

## MAY

### Strengths and Weaknesses: How Can We Make Them Work for Us?

#### Weaknesses:

- Shyness that caused over-talking
- Being shy enough to become very quiet in groups
- Impatience
- Always assuming that the other person was the guilty party whenever there is a dispute or problem of some kind
- Not being flexible enough to switch from hard-copy to digital versions of the New York Times (with several people sympathetic and considered that trait more of a strength than weakness)
- The inability to deal with the bookkeeping/billing/record-keeping parts of the job.

#### Strengths:

- Determination
- Resilience
- Collecting information on issues to send to people who would be interested and want or need to know
- Being able to live life alone competently and with some pleasure
- Curiosity

The group provided a safe setting for members to speak candidly about intimate subjects; people seemed to expose their own feelings and respond to those of others. And there was good-natured laughter and enjoyment of one another. Just what a Caring Collaborative should be.

## Upper West Side 1



Fairway Market

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Realizing our intentions**

The full scope of this question involves the setting of goals and the challenges of fulfilling them, as well as the realizing of them; the Buddhist use of the term is connected to living mindfully.

### **Letting Go of Things**

L. noted that visualizing the desired outcome is a popular strategy for overcoming inertia or resistance, J. shared her current struggle with "clutter" as an issue, as well as Marie Kondo's book on tidying (<https://www.amazon.com/Life-Changing-Magic-Tidying-Decluttering-Organizing/dp/1607747308>); She has come to see that acquiring clutter has to do with not being able to let go of things and she needs to be able recognize that some things are just "no longer needed." It's a process, though, and part of much larger issues and insights.

H. added that you have to be ready and that it is also good to have help; recently her daughter assisted her in sorting through all her clothes and creating the discard pile. It was very useful to have the support and the second opinion.

B. remembered her frugal mother and the guilt associated with getting rid of things. "You might NEED them," G. seconded. "Everything might come in handy one day!"

After downsizing in order to move from a large house to a small New York apartment, L. still feels remorse about some of the things that didn't make the cut. Photographs! B. remembered. College books and papers I wrote! J. moaned. On the other hand, R. noted, "your stuff is a part of you and connects you to your past." She, for one, would not part with a single treasured memory connected to the beautiful things she has collected over the years. Well, that's not "clutter," J. reminded her.

J. too has gotten help -- in the form of a \$110/hr. organizer who declutters by creating more structure. Her recent move required a great deal of taking stock: Why am I keeping this, she asked herself regularly and sometimes noticed that a hurt was attached to a thing. Other objects were connected to important family experiences, like

the item her son insisted on buying when they were abroad and that showed up as a forgotten talisman just as she made the final sweep of the house before leaving.

## **Civic Action**

R. thought that the current political situation put many of us in the position of wanting very much to do something but feeling at a loss as to what, and how. How to realize our intentions? "We can't get scattered," was the consensus. L. reminded us about Indivisible (<https://www.indivisibleguide.com/web/>), a group that organizes people and provides options. Planned Parenthood seemed to be an organization very much in need of our support, but R. also wants to protect the arts; J. creates environmental protection through the Sierra Club.

L. thought we ought to learn from the Tea Party and Koch brothers and organize carefully, far in advance, with attention to detail. B. noted the gerrymandering and the need to work in swing counties during the next election cycle. For S., investigating the possibility of alternatives to the Democratic Party loomed large.

In keeping with the Caring Collaborative mandate, J. and S. were in favor of organizing our buildings to support the elderly and marginal, and G. noted the threat to Medicare and Social Security. AARP is a good lobbying organization for these issues.

If there is a Muslim registry, we could sign up as Muslims; and F. suggested we register as Republicans to work on getting other people elected.

Coming back to the broader range of intentions, J. spoke of how easy it is to "lose" an intention - it just slips away and we stop doing it. Is it purely a question of discipline and willpower? She intends to write daily and has a writing group, but sometimes she just loses interest. L. thought "building in accountability" is a good strategy -- Weight Watchers does it with its "weighing in" and meetings. Having a trainer or coach often helps. If we have deadlines, or just require of ourselves to begin, we might overcome the revulsion that sometimes develops after a while.

## **APRIL**

### **Loss and Grief**

One of our members who has had two poems published in the Ibis Head Review, an online journal, read them to us. They were truly beautiful and brought much meaning to our discussion of loss and grief.

L brought up Cheryl Sandberg and her article/book Option B on the loss of her husband. Ms. Sandberg has also written Lean In, a book worth reading. L offered two websites: [Legacy.com](http://Legacy.com) and [E-passing.org](http://E-passing.org) both of which offer suggestions for notes and letters to loved ones. [Celebrationoflife.net](http://Celebrationoflife.net) was also mentioned.

### How we would like to be described after we are gone; writing our own epitaphs:

- R offered her mom's epitaph: 1) Life is short and you're dead a long time and 2) I told you Small Pox will come back.
- C jokingly added: Here lies C broken down by age and sex.
- J's partner planned his funeral and designed his epitaph: Death is the new black.
- B mentioned her age with a new awareness of the time gone by and time -- while unknown -- left. She also mentioned T.S. Elliott's: *The End of the 4<sup>th</sup> Quartet*. "We shall not cease our exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."
- L mentioned the difficulty of writing one, as well, and referred to Marge Percy's poem: *To Be of Use*.
- N wants to forget these words: Could of; should of, would of:
- C "She was determined to finish what she started."
- L brought up E.M. Forster's "Only Connect " from Howard's End
- J mentioned: Love is the Answer

L passed around the book The Power of Meaning: Crafting a Life that Matters by Emily Esfahani Smith

### Upper West Side 2



116<sup>th</sup> St. Subway Station

## MARCH

### Money

***Has your approach changed in recent years? Do you spend it differently? Do you worry about it? Do you splurge or are you frugal? Do you plan long term?***

There was a lively discussion of people's relationship with money and how it has changed as we age. Several members noted that they have become less materialistic and get less satisfaction from buying things as they age. They are more likely to use money for food, shelter and help.

One person noted that money is for making life easier.

There was consensus that most have sufficient resources to spend more freely on restaurants or cabs without struggling with “should I/shouldn’t I.” One member noted that there is a learning curve about money.

Although most have enough savings and/or income to manage living expenses with relative ease, there is uncertainty about having enough to take care of the future. Some of the worries and concerns are:

- Healthcare costs
- Limitations/financial hazards related to long term care
- House/living space
- Providing for children
- Uncertainty about spending money

It seems that having and spending money, insecurity about how much is enough may have something to do with old habits and attitudes. If one was frugal, one is likely to remain so.

### Upper West Side 3



West End Avenue

## **MARCH**

### **Medication Safety Issues:**

A member related the experience of a friend whose pharmacy dispensed a different drug than her longstanding high blood pressure medication. She became unwell immediately and had to visit her MD. This led to a discussion of medication safety tips:

- Always check prescriptions when you pick them up, and question anything that is different. This is especially important when generic meds are renewed- the tablets may look different, but could be correct.



- Sherry noted the issue that the drug name and Rx# on medication bottles are often printed in very small fonts. Difficult to read, so the wrong medicine might be taken.
- Always inquire about availability of large print patient information: medication dose & timing, adverse effects, and interactions with food and other medicines.
- When given discharge instructions after a procedure or hospital stay, be sure all aspects of the instructions are fully understood, not just legible.
- Consider consulting a Geriatrician if you are taking a large number of medicines prescribed by multiple specialists.

### **Health Buddies:**

- Each member shared whether she was currently comfortable that she had a person who was readily available to serve as her companion and advocate during a medical emergency. Several members acknowledged that they wished they had a firm “*back up*” person in the event that their current Emergency Contact was traveling, or otherwise busy.
- It was agreed that the concept of arranging a “*Health Buddy*” should be re-explored at a future meeting of the group

## **APRIL**

### **Finding purpose during life transitions**

Our discussion was based on the work of Professor Martin E.P. Seligman, whose book Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being described the components of well-being as engagement, good relationships, accomplishment, and purpose. Attendees related how these components have helped them weather stressful life transitions and regain a sense of well-being.

Some examples:

- Searching for meaningful volunteer work after retirement and finding a good skills-match with the TTN program at the Fortune Society.
- Writing a memoir of childhood in WWII Europe, which has just been published.
- Spending time every week with a longtime neighbor and friend, encouraging her to continue to engage in cultural activities.
- Taking the initiative to continue relationships with married couple friends after being widowed.
- Utilizing the Volunteer Referral Service [www.volunteer-referral.com](http://www.volunteer-referral.com) to obtain a volunteer position at OATS/Senior Planet.

## **What you can do when healthcare services do not meet your expectations:**

Several group members described recent visits to major institutions in Manhattan where they experienced significant delays in receiving care. The technique of requesting to speak to a supervisor about their long waits did not prove successful for them. When this happens two additional actions can be taken:

- 1) Writing a detailed letter, which includes the date, time, location, and names of staff members involved can often be effective. Ask not just for an apology, but what management will specifically do to prevent your experience from recurring. The letter should be mailed to the facility's Chief Executive Officer, with a CC to the Department Administrator, and the Director of Patient Relations. Their names will be on the facility's website. Also send a copy of this letter to your personal surgeon and/or primary care MD.
- 2) Filing a complaint with the NY State Department of Health in Albany, after notifying the facility of your concerns. Download the form using this link: [https://www.health.ny.gov/facilities/hospital/complaint/complaint\\_form.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/facilities/hospital/complaint/complaint_form.htm). Only a small number of patients contact the Department of Health, so this step ensures a response from both the facility and the Department of Health, although it may not arrive quickly.

### **Queens**



The Unisphere

## **MAY**

### **Various Health Issues**

One of our members had attended a workshop on health issues given by the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators and reported on the topics discussed.

1. Preparing a medical form with all information to keep displayed on the refrigerator where emergency personnel are taught to look:
  - Doctors' names & contact information
  - Medications, Medical Conditions & Allergies
  - Special health directives
  - Emergency contacts
2. How to get the most out of your doctor's visit:
  - Determine what you want out of the appointment
  - Keep a list of your symptoms

- Write down questions you want to ask
  - Have a plan for documenting what you learn
3. Questions to ask when a new drug is prescribed:
- Why am I getting this drug
  - What are the risks versus the benefits
  - Is there an older drug or lifestyle change that works just as well
4. Facts about and prevention of falls:
- risk factors (medical conditions, medication side effects, age, activity, diet)
  - Make your home “fall proof” (proper lighting, no slippery surfaces, keep clutter off the floor)