

# **Surviving and Thriving in 2023**

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The last three years have been challenging for all of us – including me! I've lost friends and colleagues and been disconnected from organizations, some of which I was involved with for decades.

People remain upset and unsettled these days – for good reason. At the beginning of this debacle most of us thought that there would be some definable end to all of this nonsense. But it's clear that this is not going to happen. Ridiculous restrictions are still being announced and enforced; bad people in government agencies and public health organizations are being replaced with worse and more incompetent people; prices are going up; there's a new disaster every week; and there is a lot of uncertainty about what's next. We know "they" are going to do something – we just do not know yet what it is.

I have always tried to be a positive person, to find the silver lining in the cloud, and to focus on good things – it's how I've survived a lot of adversity in my life before this debacle. I thought a pause to focus on something positive might be a welcome change for many readers. So here are some of the things that are keeping me sane these days. I hope they are helpful for you.

## **#1 Decide to be happy.**

Happiness is a choice – a deliberate one. According to inspirational author Carlos Casteneda, "We either make ourselves miserable or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same." Happiness can be elusive, but it is achievable in the worst of times – if you really want it and are willing to work for it. And it really does take about the same amount of mental and psychological energy to be happy as it does to be unhappy.

I think the biggest contributors to my being happy most of the time during this mess have been the willingness to make new friends and also to make sure that there is purpose to my life. See #2 for more about this.

## **#2 Do something!**

In my opinion there is nothing worse for the psyche than feeling helpless. And some of the most unhappy people I've met are "bystanders" who have been waiting for someone else to fix this situation.

Two great quotes I've lived by:

"Throughout history it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph."

Haile Salassie I

“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Almost anyone can feel better – almost immediately - just by doing something productive to help solve a problem. It does not have to be anything monumental. Start a Make Americans Free Again group, volunteer to teach children in your community, mow a neighbor’s lawn, donate food to a local food bank.

Feeling like you are part of the solution instead of watching with abject horror what occurs every day can help to keep you sane!

### **#3 Tune out bad influences.**

This is a good idea not only as it pertains to today’s events, but to life in general. Some people, some organizations, and many news outlets and social media sites have a negative influence - they are toxic. We are a product of the company we keep, the things we listen to and watch and read. We can choose positive influences or negative influences – it’s up to us. I have not watched a mainstream news program since March 2020. I make it a point to read something positive every day.

I do pay attention to the negative things that are going on in the world. There’s a lot of it and I don’t want to put my head in the sand. But I consult independent sources that do not promote propaganda from government, drug companies and medical cartels. Their information is not welcome in my head!!

### **#4 Take care of yourself.**

Poorly fed, dehydrated, sedentary, or overweight people can feel bad even when times are great. Investing in your health is something that you can control during times in which a lot of things seem out of control. Start making meal plans, batch cooking, drinking water, going to bed on time, and exercising 5-6 days per week and you’ll feel like a new person in a short time. AND you will be more stress-hardy. Taking care of myself has paid off – I’ve been able to do the work of 5 people while feeling great most of the time.

### **#5 Figure out what is really important. (Hint – it’s not everything!)**

Almost everyone has had to make difficult choices during the last three years. Trips have been cancelled, college educations have been postponed, and mask and vaccine requirements have resulted in cancelling subscriptions to cultural events and activities. Some people are clearly more miserable than others about these choices.

In my opinion, times like this force us to consider carefully what is important to us, and many of us have figured out that life as we know will not end because a conference we

used to enjoy attending now requires a vax and we won't be going, or some friends who used to be close want nothing to do with us now.

Ask yourself this: "In the grand scheme of things, how will this affect my life seven days, seven weeks, seven months and seven years from now?" For almost every choice, by the time you get to seven years the impact is almost zero. We have become a society of spoiled people who are convinced we should have everything and anything anytime we want it and sometimes that is just not possible while navigating this new world we are living in. A different point of view is required if you want to survive and thrive during this mess.

The solution is to make other plans. While many of the things I used to do have gone away, I have found other things to do instead. I adopted a new cat (Winston), have spent more time working in my yard, I've read more books, and I teach more yoga classes. I'm busy doing things I love – just a different mix of things than before.

### **#6 Let go!**

"Some of us think holding on makes us strong, but sometimes it is letting go."  
Hermann Hesse

Sadness is the right response to leaving something or someone behind – even when there is no other choice, when someone breaches your trust, or when someone is disrespectful of your point of view.

What's not good is hanging on to relationships that are not healthy because you think you must and because you want to avoid the pain of letting go of them. When you do this, you perpetuate the pain that you are trying to avoid. It's like having an open wound and insisting on continuing to pick at the sore.

Letting go will make you stronger, allow you to do better for yourself, and to become an inspiration to others.

Strength and inspiration are not the result of going along to get along; pleasing others for the moment, and doing anything to fit in. Strength and inspiration result from being a principled person who stands for something or for a lot of things, regardless of the immediate consequences. There is a price to be paid for immediate gratification and compromising ourselves while holding on. There is also a price to be paid for letting go – feeling sad and uncomfortable for a time. Only you can decide which value proposition works best for you.

### **#7 Perseverance matters!**

Perseverance is defined as "the continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition." It's clearly not wishing for something; it involves

sticking with something even in the face of uncertainty, and it means not caving when things get tough.

Perseverance requires endurance, and Buddha once said, "endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is to the one who endures that the final victory comes." Perseverance requires mental toughness. It means getting up and trying again – and again and again.

It means trusting that you will succeed when things are uncertain and the odds seem insurmountable. And according to research studies, those who have higher levels of perseverance and optimism had lower levels of depression and anxiety.

Our history is filled with people who failed – sometimes a lot – before they succeeded. Henry Ford went bankrupt 5 times before building Ford Motor Company into a success. Thomas Edison is famous for trying 10,000 ways his invention did not work before finding the one that would. He did not think of these as failures, but rather steps to his eventual success. He said, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." Abraham Lincoln lost 8 elections before he became President.

Perseverance involves developing the character that can withstand challenges and disappointments, and remaining optimistic while facing very difficult situations. It means managing frustrations and controlling thoughts and emotions. It means taking responsibility for ourselves and our actions. And it is how we can make life better for ourselves and future generations.

### **#8 Take Risks.**

Here's one of my favorite quotes about taking risks:

"You may be 38 years old, as I happen to be. And one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid...You refuse to do it because you want to live longer... You're afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you, or shoot at you or bomb your house; so you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are 90, but you're just as dead at 38 as you would be at 90. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

I have taken some huge risks in my life, and one of them was deciding to organize to both regain our freedoms and to punish the perpetrators of COVID-19. Posting a video on March 10 2020 about what was really going on was risky – I put everything on the line when I did that, and again when I started Make Americans Free Again and yet

again when we filed the first lawsuit in federal court. But all things considered I'd rather jump in and do something than think "what if?" for the rest of my life.

So, look at your life, figure out what you are afraid of, and do something outside your comfort zone. It's the only way to grow, it's the pathway to an adventurous life, and it often leads to wonderful things, particularly if you expect that this will be the case. (see #9)

### **#9 Start every day with positive expectation.**

I've interacted with a lot of people during my 66 years on this planet and have noticed something interesting. People get what they expect. I've known people who expect to fail, expect that things will go wrong, and this is usually how things turned out for them. A former employee used to expect the worst and even her 2-week European vacation, according to her, was a disaster.

Conversely, I've also known people who get up every morning and believe that good things are ahead. They maintain this attitude almost no matter what happens and they end up being just as right as the people who think nothing will ever work out for them. I've had the benefit of some family members, mentors and friends who had positive expectations about life and I saw how powerful the effect could be. So, while I've been painfully aware of how dire things have been for the last three years, I've also known – deep in my heart – that it would all turn out ok in the end. And it is starting to turn out ok. We are winning in the courts, the world is waking up, we are building a better society in some ways, and we are going to get the bad guys.

Start every day assuming that something good is coming your way. It takes practice, and you have to use the other tools I've listed here, but you can get to the place where you expect good things and good things will happen to you!

### **#10 Enjoy this summer!**

No matter what is wrong in our lives there are others who are worse off. Think about how great things are RIGHT NOW. You have enough food, gas prices ARE going up but you're still driving, and you have enough money to pay your bills. You're better off than most of the people living on the planet.

Take a little time each day to appreciate how the sunshine feels on your face, the longer days, and the beautiful flowers and green, green grass! If we learn how to be happy and content and take time to notice the beauty that is everywhere, we can feel content that life is ok right now. Staying in the beautiful moment is a great inoculation against depression and anxiety and feelings of uncertainty.