



MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

December 2021

Monthly Wellness Message

*Do not try to save
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is yours alone to sing
falls into your open cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself
to this world so worthy of rescue.*

~ Martha Postlethwaite

I hope this holiday season brings you closer to your own song. It can be so hard to hear some days, particularly when caregiving and as we try to be so many things and for so many people. The shadow side of love and generosity is giving more than we may have to offer at any given time. When we show up to be present for another's needs or suffering without first being present with our own, we risk disconnection from ourselves and encounter an imbalance which can leave us feeling more helpless and bereft. *This is not a time to judge ourselves.* Wanting to provide relief is noble and kind, and yet it may be something much deeper than the relief we are seeking to soothe and protect; something closer to worthiness. When we are hard on ourselves for not being able to show up the ways we'd like to, or feel the way we'd like to, it's helpful to gently inquire if we are truly okay with not being okay? Can we tolerate another's pain and simply be with them, without offering anything beyond our present listening? Can we do this for ourselves? Ultimately, as the poet suggests, this is the most essential act of being present for the people we care about. It's in the clearing where we will recognize what we need, as well as the seeds of knowing and trusting what to do next.



There is something draining and transactional about an offering which feels met with expectation, even when that expectation is our own, unexpressed or unconsciously. There can be fear underneath a desire to connect and be helpful, especially when we hope to quell any difficulty within ourselves or difficulty which is not ours to fix. As the poet suggests, *this world is so worthy of rescue.* Though as individuals, despite our behaviors at times, we do not need a rescue. What we really need is to feel safe, to feel heard and to be met consistently with presence. In this way, we are whole and worthy without needing any answers or offerings. It's also a willingness to be seen and to be met as someone who also experiences suffering. This is the difference between sympathy and compassion. Our pain exposes so many vulnerabilities we'd rather hide, though it shows us something universal, deeply connecting and honest about who we are and how we can compassionately respond to others and the people we love.

As the poem beautifully illustrates, it is in the quiet clearing of our inner life where we learn to listen and cultivate the strength to know our song - or as I interpret this to mean - how to be a safe and grounded person; for ourselves, others and in the world. The hard truth is, we don't know what is best for other people. Honestly, we're not always good at knowing this for ourselves! And we are particularly bad at guessing what others are thinking and how others really feel. And that's okay. The safest people are those who understand this, who don't assume and who know how to return to their clearing. They listen to

harmonize. Deeply respecting one's own song (our desires and needs) while caring about another's is a sign of balance and wellbeing. This fosters more peace and connection in the midst of any struggle and suffering. *Wait there patiently, until the song that is yours alone to sing falls into your open cupped hands.*

Who and what do you turn toward in your life to hear your song? To sing it back when you need help remembering? Is this something you can also provide to yourself?

It has become a tradition in December, in the monthly *Catching Your Breath* program, to write a letter to ourselves reviewing the past year, acknowledging growth and challenges, sorrows and sufferings, triumphs and treasures. It's a deepening practice which, when approached seriously and contemplatively, affirms aspects of our experience easily lost in the dense wooded areas of our daily lives. I invite you to do this for yourself, to settle into a quiet and protected space for 15 minutes or a ½ hour and simply begin writing with the word *Dear*, followed by your own name. Proceed patiently by first thanking yourself for all the ways you have shown up for yourself this year and also, for the people you love. Explore times when it wasn't clear what to do and how you responded and what you learned. Consider the twists and turns, and the surprises too. Be kind and offer yourself encouragement. There are endless prompts, though I invite you to simply see where it takes you. Hopefully, much closer to *the clearing in the dense forest of your life.*

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW
Wellness Initiative Managing Director



Are you a caregiver who has participated in our wellness programs? A new program is available to you this spring



LLMSW and Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW.

Living Grief

Our Living Grief program is a twice monthly exploration of grief for *family caregivers of adults living with a dementia*. The program is offered virtually for six months. Our next session will begin this spring.

A variety of topics will be discussed, including ambiguous loss, anticipatory grief, and relationship changes.

This program is led by Theresa Gierzynski,

If you are interested in participating in our upcoming session, please indicate your interest at the link below. Finalized dates will be shared as the program approaches.

[Interest form](#)

Wellness Program Registration

Catching Your Breath

December 13, 10 - 11:30 a.m.

Catching Your Breath is a monthly program focused on learning and practicing stress resilience skills for continued health, balance, and well-being. The program is for *family caregivers of adults living with a dementia*.

Mitten Minds Support Group

December 21, 3 - 4 p.m.

The Mitten Minds Support Group is a monthly support group for *individuals with mild cognitive impairment or early stage dementia*. The support group provides a space for individuals living with memory loss to meet and learn from others going through similar experiences.

Have a Seat

Thursdays from 12 - 12:30 p.m.

Have a Seat is a weekly guided meditation program. Would you like to receive weekly email reminders to join the program? Subscribe [here](#) to receive.

[Join by Zoom](#)

Soothing Word of the Month



Mellifluous

(of a voice or words) sweet or musical; pleasant to hear

Research Looking for Caregivers

Family Dynamics and Influence in Dementia Care (FDI-DC)

This study investigates how the availability and circumstances of family members influence the type and level of care over time. The study's focus is to learn the social, financial, and health circumstances of family members of persons with dementia and how the care availability changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aims to learn about dementia care transitions influenced by changes in family circumstances. The study is recruiting spouses or adult children of an adult who received a dementia diagnosis at least one year ago. For more information and to participate, contact Bona Park at parkbo@umich.edu or 734-985-0526.

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COVID-19 Coping and Resilience Care Partners Study (CARE)

This study investigates experiences among couples living with dementia during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic to learn more about ways to help both partners live well together. The study is looking for couples (married or living together) residing in Michigan in which one partner has received a diagnosis of dementia within about 5 years or has early symptoms of dementia. For more information, contact the study team at C19carepartners@umich.edu or 734-232-4565.

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Identifying Factors Predicting Accurately End-of-Life in Dementia with Lewy Bodies and Promoting Quality End-of-Life Experiences (PACE-DLB)

This study aims to understand what changes might predict the end of life in people living with dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB). This information will help patients, caregivers, families, and health care professionals know what to expect in later stages of DLB. Study is enrolling individuals with at least moderate stage DLB and their main caregiver, and the caregiver must be able to answer questionnaires related to the DLB and caregiver experience. Study is conducted via Zoom or by phone. Contact Kelly Mattingly at mattinke@med.umich.edu or 734-223-9297 for more information.

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WeCareAdvisor: A Web-Based Tool to Improve Quality of Life for Military Veterans with Dementia and their Caregivers (WeCareAdvisor)

This study is seeking caregivers to test the WeCareAdvisor, a web-based tool that aims to help users learn more about and manage behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia like wandering, repeated questioning, anger, depression or apathy. This study is looking for participants who have access to a computer or mobile device with internet and are also the primary in-home caregivers for a military Veteran who is living with dementia. This study does not require any in-person visits; it will be completely virtual. Contact Barbara Stanislawski at bstanis@med.umich.edu or 734-232-0323.

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