



# The Masterpiece Living Mosaic

A Celebration of Successful Aging

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## Staying Focused During the Holidays

by Danielle Palli



*"City sidewalks, busy sidewalks. Dressed in holiday style. In the air there's a feeling of Christmas: children laughing, people passing, meeting smile after smile..."*

If only reality were more reminiscent of those holiday songs, where it's always the "most wonderful time of the year." But for many people, the holidays are a time of great stress. Reportedly, the holiday season is ranked the sixth most stressful life event, ranking right up there with divorce, starting a new job and moving.

What is it that consumes us? Our to-do lists? Traffic and crowds? Family drama? Financial worries? Or perhaps it's the intense sadness when we remember lost loved ones. As we reach the end of another year, we naturally reflect on what the year brought us. But sometimes, we tend to focus on the negative, and not the positive.

Gautama Buddha tells us, "We are what we think. All that we are arises from our thoughts. We make the world." This quote tells us of a profound but very elusive truth ... We choose happiness. What will you choose to focus on this holiday season?

As we approach the New Year I'd like to offer three tips I've learned on my sometimes bumpy way from childhood joy, to Scrooge-like cynicism, and finally to contentment and joy.

### Three Tips for Finding Focus and Joy

1. **Have an Other-Centered Task List** - Instead of making your to-do list a dreaded chore, think of these tasks as acts of

kindness and giving that will make someone happy. And as you make your way through the hustle and bustle of crowded streets and stores, think of how wonderful it is that all of us, as a whole, are united with a common goal of celebration.

2. **Be Present: Don't Miss the Holiday Experience** - Wherever you are (Traffic? A long line?) - BE there. Observe those around you and revel in the decorations, the lights, the music and the faces of children. The world is indeed a wonderful place.

3. **Be Grateful** - Research consistently tells us that those who express gratitude are happier than those who do not. If we focus on being grateful for what we have rather than what we've lost or what we want, how can we be anything but happy? Make it a practice when you awaken and when you go to bed to reflect on several things that you are grateful for.

## Just Breathe...

While the rest of the world is picking up the pace and muscling their way through an often stressful and busy holiday season, Masterpiece Living invites you to slow down and ... breathe. Relaxation has been shown to lower blood pressure, reduce muscle tension and pain, increase blood flow, reduce stress and fatigue, and leave us with a greater sense of wellbeing.

**Breathe™**, a four-session stress resilience Program by Masterpiece Living, educates participants about the physiology of stress and how we can all be empowered to build resilience against chronic stress through supportive strategies.



## Shirley's SMILE Campaign

by Danielle Palli

"I think people would feel better if they smiled at each other more often," Shirley Gaul said one day. It was a simple statement that would springboard into a campus-wide campaign at Presbyterian Homes and Services. Shirley was a resident ambassador who never missed an opportunity to go on outings, participate in every activity, and attend all religious services - she even played regularly in the hand-bell choir. Now, she would find herself initiating what became known as the SMILE campaign.

The premise is simple ... participants received a card with five blank squares on them. Secret staff and resident "spotters" were chosen to carry smiley face stickers and award participants anytime they were "caught in the act" of smiling. Once a card was filled, it was entered into a raffle bin, and the card bearer had the chance to win a weekly prize. There was no limit to the number of cards a person could fill - the more a person smiled, the better their chance of winning.

The month-long campaign was both staff and resident-led and developed across all levels of living. Shirley had spent her life working as an elementary schoolteacher, and was continuing to teach - this time sharing the importance of kindness and a positive attitude.

Shirley passed away last Spring, but fond memories of her remarkable nature continue. "She was inspiring," Jane Devecis, Activities Director for Presbyterian Home for Central New York, Inc., told the Mosaic. "Despite health challenges, she would take life's lemons and make lemonade.

She had such a positive presence." Shirley, we were told, was also responsible for "greening" the long-term community where she lived. When she moved in, she had so many plants and not enough room to contain them, that they had to be distributed throughout the building for everyone to enjoy ... just another way she spread happiness around her.

Chaplain Tom Lorenz recounted stories of Shirley's generous spirit and told us, "she was always laughing and finding reasons to laugh." Chaplain Tom and Jane recalled one day when Shirley returned from the hospital; team members had all gathered at the entrance of the main lobby to greet her and give her a standing ovation. While being led back to her room, she could be seen grinning from ear to ear. That was the impact she had on those around her. On many occasions, she could be spotted sitting in the sun alongside a friend, with a big smile on her face.

The legacy of Shirley's SMILE campaign remains to this day. Throughout the campus, you'll find team members and residents alike wearing special buttons with simple but profound messages: "Smiles are free but worth a lot," and "Be the reason someone smiles today."

*Thank you, Shirley, for bringing a smile to so many faces.*



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