

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Your Wellness Declaration, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 1, 2016)

What is your definition of Wellness? Over the past 30 plus years much has been written and voiced about wellness. On previous occasions I have covered the tenets of wellness as described by John W. Travis, MD, MPH, as modified (with Travis' permission) by yours truly.

This time, I would like to spend a little more concentrated time on each aspect of what Travis and I consider Wellness. The first tenet is **“Wellness is a choice.... a decision you make to move toward optimal health.”** Michael Arloski, PhD, our nation's notable health/wellness coaching professional and trainer (<https://realbalance.com/>) defines the choice and commitment to optimal health and wellness as follows: “Wellness is a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential. Wellness is multi-dimensional and holistic (encompassing such factors as lifestyle, mental, and spiritual wellbeing and the environment). Wellness is positive and affirming.”

As Arloski states, wellness is a conscious, self-directed, and evolving process of achieving full potential. That process begins with a choice. Your decision to begin your wellness journey starts with your first step toward the level of health and wellness you always dreamed about but never quite stepped up to the challenge and opportunity. So,

let's take the first step together. Get out a piece of paper and pencil. Write down a maximum of three sentences describing what you want to achieve toward your highest wellness potential. You probably wonder why I asked you to use the old-fashioned paper and pencil and not your ipad, tablet, computer, or phone. I believe when you use a pencil and paper, you will more consciously meditate on what you will declare. Each sentence and word will begin to mean much more to you. In this fast-paced, texting world, we have lost much of that contemplative wisdom with what we write and say. And we often get ourselves into trouble too with those who hear or read our rant, that we regret later.

Here are some questions to consider. I encourage you to write down the questions and your responses.

1. What one key barrier do you see right now keeping you from seeking, reaching, and achieving your desired wellness?
2. What first step will you take this week to resolve that barrier?
3. How will this action contribute to achieving your declaration?
4. Who or what do you need to include to succeed?

Keep in mind as you write your declaration and responses . . . wellness is not only physical. It is multi-dimensional and holistic involving all aspects of your life. Once you have your declaration and responses down on paper, it's time for you to sit with a trusted family member or friend to help you brainstorm your declaration, the questions, as well as your responses.

Give your friend permission to keep you accountable to your commitment to this first tenet of wellness. Their help can make all the difference as you choose to move

toward your optimal health and wellbeing. In the next article, the tenet to be covered will be “Wellness is a way of life...*a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for wellbeing.*” Until then, think about how your life does or doesn’t support your declaration, and how you would like to design your lifestyle to achieve your wellness dreams and goals.

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From the Heart. . .

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Your Wellness Declaration, part 2

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Throughout this month's lifeskill, *Wellness*, we will spend some concentrated time on each aspect of what wellness means. Over the past 30 plus years much has been written and voiced about wellness. On previous occasions I have covered the tenets of wellness as described by John W. Travis, MD, MPH, as modified (with permission by Travis) by yours truly.

The first tenet covered was "Wellness is a choice.... *a decision you make to move toward optimal health.*" You were asked to write down your own Wellness Declaration. These questions were then presented to consider. At this moment, think about your responses before reading the next tenet of Wellness.

1. What one key barrier do you see right now keeping you from seeking, reaching, and achieving your desired wellness?
2. What first step will you take this week to resolve that barrier?
3. How will this action contribute to achieving your declaration?
4. Who or what do you need to include to succeed?

As you write down your declaration and responses . . . wellness is not only physical. It is multi-dimensional and holistic involving all aspects of your life.

The 2nd tenet is “Wellness is a way of life...*a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for wellbeing.*” This is where you begin to make changes in your life that will impact you physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Not one area of your life is left out as you declare and take action to seek, reach, and achieve wellness as a way of daily living. Yet, this change just doesn’t happen. Change is never a single event but a process. In part one, you made your declaration, identified one key barrier, and made your first step toward removing that barrier.

This brings you to the 3rd tenet: “Wellness is a process...*a developing awareness that there is no end point, but that health and happiness are possible in each moment, here and now.*” When committed to the process you not only experience greater health but also greater happiness in life. Yet, as much as we love when good things come our way, even improved health, we all know happiness cannot be sustained if we only “feel” happy when circumstances are going good.

Somewhere along the way when the bad stuff happens, we will be challenged to broaden our horizon in order to achieve and sustain true happiness. Recently, my husband and I watched a program entitled “Happy” (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1613092/>). Quoting Benjamin Franklin, “The Constitution only guarantees the American People the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.” What do you choose to do to pursue happiness?

The film, HAPPY, takes you on a journey from the swamps of Louisiana to the slums of Kolkata in search of what really makes people happy. Combining real life stories of people from around the world and powerful interviews with the leading scientists in happiness research, HAPPY explores the secrets behind our most valued

emotion. According to this fascinating documentary, we actually have happiness in our genes at a 50% set point or range. Even when bad things happen, we eventually return to that set point. Our circumstances (income, social status, where we live, age) only account for 10% of our happiness. The remaining 40% involves “Intentional Activity” which are actions you choose to do.

With intentional activity, making even subtle changes to that activity add spice to your life, thereby greater happiness. And what kinds of “intentional activity” you choose can be as varied as there are human beings on this planet of ours, no matter the circumstances. Whatever the activity, your body is also physiologically affected by the chemicals produced via your neurotransmitters. We are definitely fearfully and wonderfully made. Maybe our mind and heart need to cooperate more with our bodies.

We hopefully all know once you reach a certain economic level to feed and clothe your family, more money doesn't bring more happiness. No matter your circumstances, happiness does help you work for and reach your goals, whatever they may be. Yet, the key to lasting happiness comes from having a good family, good friends, spontaneous times, lots of laughter, and lots of play with people you love.

Throughout this coming week reflect on what your daily life is all about. How do your activities support your wellness declaration, resolving barriers, designing a way of life you dream about, and enjoying the process as you become more aware that health and happiness happens with each moment in the here and now. You are then building your future with each of those moments.

The couple tenets of wellness to be covered next week will help you connect and integrate your own declaration and actions with your environment and hopefully provide energy for transforming you and even the world around you.

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From the Heart...

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Your Wellness Declaration, part 3

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 15, 2016)

Let's continue to cover in more detail the basic tenets of wellness, as described by John W. Travis, MD, MPH, as modified (with permission by Travis) by yours truly. The first tenet covered was "Wellness is a choice.... *a decision you make to move toward optimal health.*" You were asked to write down your own Wellness Declaration. These questions were then presented to consider covering one key barrier to reaching your wellness potential, your first step to resolve that barrier, how that action will help you achieve your declaration, and who/what do you need to succeed.

Since wellness is multi-dimensional and holistic involving all aspects of your life, the 2nd tenet discussed was "Wellness is a way of life...*a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for wellbeing.*" This is where you begin to make changes in your life that will impact you physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Your "way of life" is a journey and process not just a single event.

This brought you to the 3rd tenet: "Wellness is a process...*a developing awareness that there is no end point, but that health and happiness are possible in each moment, here and now.*" When committed to the process you not only experience greater health but also greater happiness in life. Yet, life comes with both opportunities and challenges. You may not always "feel" happy. Somewhere along the way when the

bad stuff happens, it will be time to give some priorities to what is really most important to you and your family, including your wellness.

The next couple tenets will help you connect and integrate your own declaration and actions with your environment and energy for transforming you and even the world around you. The 4th tenet is “Wellness is a balanced channeling of energy...*energy received from the environment, transformed within you, and returned to affect the world around you.*” For some this tenet may be a little confusing as to what it all means. Basically, we only have 24 hours in a day. In those hours we live our lives and use whatever energy we have to accomplish our daily tasks.

The key here is “balance.” Your environment involves not just you (body, soul, spirit) but also the physical and relational environment you have all around you. At this moment, where are you expending your energy? Are there things and people you are involved with that tend to drain your energy so you struggle with even seeking and reaching for your wellness potential? If so, it’s time to reevaluate where you are and what you give up to gain.

The 5th tenet is “Wellness is the integration of the body, mind, and spirit.... *the appreciation that everything you do, and think, and feel, and believe has an impact on your state of health.*” See how this tenet fits and helps guide you through the other tenets of wellness? The key word here is “integration.” What is your body telling you? How is your mind or thoughts affected? And deep in your heart or spirit, what are you hearing? Is it contrary to what your body and thoughts are saying? If so, integration will be hard to achieve until your heart/spirit, thoughts/mind, and body are in sync. If this is your struggle, again, it’s time to reflect on those barriers whether it’s how you use your

time, your physical environment, or your relationships. Today, make one change to align the “whole” of you. You will be amazed how much more energy you have both physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Next week the final two tenets will be covered. They have everything to do with you accepting yourself and seeing wellness in your relationships.

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From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Your Wellness Declaration, part 4

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Before we cover the final two tenets of wellness, let's do a short review. The first tenet, as described by John W. Travis, MD, MPH, and modified (with permission by Travis) by yours truly, was "Wellness is a choice... *a decision you make to move toward optimal health.*" You were asked to write down your own Wellness Declaration. These questions were then presented to consider covering one key barrier to reaching your wellness potential, your first step to resolve that barrier, how that action will help you achieve your declaration, and who/what do you need to succeed.

The 2nd tenet discussed was "Wellness is a way of life...*a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for wellbeing.*" This is where you begin to make changes in your life that will impact you physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Your "way of life" is a journey and process not just a single event. This brought you to the 3rd tenet: "Wellness is a process...*a developing awareness that there is no end point, but that health and happiness are possible in each moment, here and now.*" You may not always "feel" happy. Somewhere along the way when the bad stuff happens, it will be time to give some priorities to what is really most important for you and your family.

The 4th tenet is "Wellness is a balanced channeling of energy...*energy received from the environment, transformed within you, and returned to affect the world around*

you.” For some this tenet may be a little confusing as to what it all means. Basically, we only have 24 hours in a day. In those hours we live our lives and use whatever energy we have to accomplish our daily tasks. The key here is “balance.”

The 5th tenet is “Wellness is the integration of the body, mind, and spirit.... *the appreciation that everything you do, and think, and feel, and believe has an impact on your state of health.*” See how this tenet fits and helps guide you through the other tenets of wellness? The key word here is “integration.” What is your body telling you? How is your mind or thoughts affected? And deep in your heart or spirit, what are you hearing? Today, make a change to align the “whole” of you for more energy, both physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

The 6th and final 7th tenets of wellness are “Wellness is the loving acceptance of yourself” and “Wellness is Relationships! “ The word Illness starts with “I” and Wellness starts with “WE.” We all definitely prefer going through life with someone by our side. Going it alone or being “independent” may be a motto for many. Yet, I have discovered over the years that wanting to always be alone has everything to do with struggling to accept oneself just as we are. Self-criticism and the drive for perfection can derail any relationship. We are born to connect, and wellness cannot be truly achieved and sustained without relationships that nurture our lives.

The support we all need each day comes more easily when we accept every part of who we are . . . our strengths, our challenges, our areas of weakness. It doesn’t mean we stop there. Self-acceptance actually helps us gain a burst of freedom and energy to move forward and connect with others toward the level of wellness we desire and often only dream about.

In this month's final lifeskill article series on Wellness next week, I will share my own wellness declaration. I put my declaration into motion about 30 plus years ago that intimately reflects these seven tenets of wellness I learned up front and personal through the years. See you on the journey!

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From the Heart...

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



My Wellness Declaration, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 29, 2016)

For the past several weeks the basic tenets of wellness have been covered.

According to John W. Travis, MD from his *Wellness Workbook* . . .

- **Wellness is a choice**
- **Wellness is a way of life**
- **Wellness is a process**
- **Wellness is a balanced channeling of energy**
- **Wellness is the integration of the body, mind, and spirit**
- **Wellness is the loving acceptance of yourself**
- **Wellness is Relationships!**

Travis also coined this apt phrase, "CONNECTEDNESS IS THE CURRENCY OF WELLNESS." When I think about my own wellness journey, going it alone when facing the "I" in Illness definitely wasn't the route to take. I too needed to accept and seek out the "We" in Wellness for myself. Yet, at the time, I didn't know it would take me on a 30 plus year journey to embrace that wellness was a choice I take. Wellness became a way of life for me. Wellness was definitely a process with no end point and health and happiness was possible in each moment in the here and now.

The journey taught me that wellness needs to be a balance of energy around me, inside me, and given to others. I wasn't as afraid anymore but began to appreciate everything in what I do, think, feel, and believe. One of the biggest hurdles was seeing wellness as the loving acceptance of myself just as I am. Only then was I able to reach out to others with the genuine me. With every "We" step I found those relationships helping me gain wellness and wholeness along the way I wouldn't have experienced any other way.

This is my wellness declaration I made 30 plus years ago, at the beginning of my journey: *"To proactively seek, reach, and achieve wholeness and wellbeing in every area of my life. To celebrate life and have those experiences in my life become "a door of hope" for others, professionally and personally. To be my husband's life partner...enjoying together the opportunities and challenges life brings our way. To delight in seeing my lovely daughters experience life at its fullest...to offer friendship each day, counsel when asked, and my unconditional love throughout their lives. To leave a legacy of hope, faith, and love."*

Today, I am at the young-at-heart age of 71! And still counting! I won't even try to cover those 30 plus years in one swallow but will offer a glimpse here. Some additional morsels will be served during the next month's lifeskill, *Meals*, since so much of my wellness journey centered around mealtime as medicine through the years. My hope is each "food for thought" bite will give you hope, personal insight, and commitment to start your own wellness journey. Yours may not be the same as mine. Yet, possibly some of it will spark a path uniquely tailored for you. So, here we go . . . In the beginning . . .

Nope, this won't be a "biblical" chronicle! However, for every story told there is always a beginning if we are willing to dig a little deeper and further back in time to connect the dots. For me, it was a childhood filled with the good, the bad, the ugly. In the middle of the Hollywood California scene, my Dad and Mom worked hard to make a life for the three of us siblings, me being the middle child. My Dad had his own childhood story of neglect, abuse, and more. And him working at Paramount Studios, with all its glamour and grisly, only made the growing up even more complicated.

How do you sort out the good from the bad?. Yes, there were many good memories but also some very bad ones. Childhood sexual abuse by the one you call Daddy does complicate life and can forever change who you are and what you become. Then add being a fairly sickly child with iron & pernicious anemia and asthma, resulting in a dangerously infective tonsillectomy at four years old. I thought, "every kid goes through these childhood ailments. No big deal." Yet, I found myself hiding who I was for many years in a Pollyanna world that was just fine with me for awhile.

Yet, growing up and older comes to us all along the way. From being severely anemic and asthmatic I so easily caught colds and other germs around me, I simply thought that was the norm. I entered my teens as a shy one and moved into young adulthood with my Pollyanna perspective still completely intact with no memories of much of my childhood. Except for a few happy glimpses I chose to remember, I blissfully continued on.

From my twenties into my thirties I married, earned a degree in art and business, and continued to have a variety of ailments pop up. As I pressed on determined to ignore the signs both physically and emotionally, I was having too much fun pursuing a

career in the arts while using my business skills at the same time. I also birthed two beautiful daughters in spite of the toll it took on my body. I just kept pressing on like the good Pollyanna girl I was! See you next week for part two of my story, as the journey continues . . .

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