

# FLORAL PARK

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# Letter From The President

by Jeffrey Katz

## Floral Park ...Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Why do people get married? An answer from a scene in the movie *Shall We Dance?* resonated with me from the moment I saw it. The plot: For longer than he can remember, John Clark (Richard Gere) has led a dull existence. Even with a successful career in law, a charming wife (played by Susan Sarandon) and a loving family, he still feels something is missing. One night on his evening commute, he notices a beautiful woman (Jennifer Lopez) staring out from the window of a dance studio. Haunted by her gaze, John impulsively jumps off the train, signs up for dance lessons and his whole life begins to change. Meanwhile his wife, concerned about the sudden change in her husband, hires a private investigator. In one of my favorite scenes in the movie the private investigator asks Beverly, "Why do people get married?" Beverly brushes off romance and passion and instead offers: "We need a witness to our lives. There are 8 billion people on the planet...I mean, what does any one life really mean? But in a marriage, you're promising to care about everything — the good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things...all of it, all the time, every day. You're saying, 'Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it. Your life will not go unwitnessed because I will be your witness.'"

The Zulu greeting Sawubona means "I see you." The traditional response, "Yabo sawubona," means "Yes I see you too" or "I see you seeing me." Implicit in this greeting is the sense that until you are seen, you don't exist. In essence, when you are recognized and acknowledged, only then are you brought into being. So as we look longer and harder into the screens of our devices, we lose more of this sense of seeing one another.

There is an idea from quantum mechanics that particles do not actually exist until they are observed. This notion is contrary to common sense — all young children eventually learn that an object continues to exist even when you can't see it. But there is something intriguing about the idea that, fundamentally, the observer actively participates in the ongoing creation of the universe. To twist Descartes' famous saying around a bit: I see you, and you see me seeing you, therefore we are.



I was having dinner at a restaurant not long ago and noticed a young woman and her child sitting at the table across from mine. The child couldn't have been more than two years old. The woman was staring into her phone and no matter how hard the child tried to get her attention, the woman couldn't seem to pull herself away. I thought, *Put your damn phone away your kid just needs you to look at her!* The child began to cry and my first instinct was to blame the mother, to think of her as a terrible parent and leave it at that. But knowing a bit about how cell phones are designed, not just their technical function and features, but also the psychological design that goes into making the phones nearly irresistible for anyone (even

for the people who design them), I realized that what I was seeing was less about one particular bad parent and her child, and more about an issue that negatively affects nearly everyone in modern society.

Imagine what it's like to be a child in today's world, when that child has to compete with a cell phone for a parent's attention.

We don't see each other much anymore and the humanity that's gone missing is making us more irritable, more isolated, and far less in touch with our sense of gratitude and purpose, the two things known to be most responsible for our happiness and well-being.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow suggested that the need to be recognized is universal. We have physical needs for food, shelter and security. But beyond these we have psychological needs, the deepest of which is to be known and valued for who we are. Ideas can be found in books but a sense of value and recognition can only be had from other people, and it matters. A sense of worth, affirmed by others is a source of moral energy, perhaps the most potent there is.

In Floral Park, we strive to know our fellow neighbors not abstractly but personally and intimately. When we walk our streets we turn our faces toward our neighbors because we value them individually. There is no greater source of contentment than this—knowing that we are known, recognizing that we are recognized. The Floral Park neighborhood is the communal expression of love. It is where I am valued simply for who I am, how I live and what I give to others. It is the place where they know my name.