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**Floral Park
Home & Garden
Anniversary Tour
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Home & Garden Tour

March issue / 2023

Letter From The President

by Jeffrey Katz

I keep telling myself that life isn't a dress rehearsal. I need reminding, because I so often tend to forget.

Viktor Frankl, the renowned Austrian psychiatrist, was born in the early 1900s. He wrote a classic called, *Man's Search for Meaning*. If you haven't read it, you should. If you have, you should read it again.

Victor Frankl was a Jew and a survivor of the Holocaust. He'd seen the worst that humankind has to offer. The conceit of his book is that if you have a purpose, if you've created a life of meaning for yourself, you can get through almost anything.

Frankl has several famous quotes, but the one that sticks with me is this: "Live as though you're living a second time and as though the first time you lived, you did it wrong, and now you're trying to do things right."

When the wonderful notion, live as though you're living a second time is at the forefront of your mind, it becomes a meditation, a focused intention to carry you forward as you get tossed about by life's vicissitudes. With it, every moment becomes a little more sacred, a little more elevated. I'll often hear people say, "I've got a couple of hours to kill."

It's a frightening thing to say. All we have is time. Why make "killing it" a casual part of our day-to-day conversations?

Setting things straight, getting things right — in this very moment — is fundamental to every search for meaning. It's a pathway to doing what so many talk about, but so few actually do, which is to be present in one's own life. Accepting the idea that life is a mulligan -- a profound do-over -- adds urgency to the accomplishment of whatever it is we want to change about ourselves.

In February, the Floral Park Book Club read *The Measure*, by Nikki Erlick -- a book which tackles the question: what would you do if you knew how long you had to live? In Erlick's imagined world, every adult (age twenty-two and older) wakes on an otherwise ordinary morning to find an engraved box on the doorstep containing a single

string. Initially, no one knows what the strings mean, but it soon becomes clear that they indicate the length of the recipient's life. There's nothing forcing anyone to look inside the box, and some decide not to, but most bow to temptation. Quickly, society separates into factions: "long-stringers," who have the security of knowing that they will live full lives, and "short-stringers," who have a different fate.

My wife, Suzee, shared a very poignant excerpt: "Nowadays, we want to avoid the idea of death as much as possible. We don't like to talk about illness, we isolate our dying community members and hospitals and nursing homes, we relegate cemeteries to remote stretches along the highway. I suppose short-stringers are the lat-

est group to suffer from our death-averse ways, and perhaps more than any before.

"But you asked if everyone deserves happiness. I certainly think so. And I don't think having a short string should make that impossible. If I've learned anything from all the stories I've read -- of love and friendship, adventure and bravery -- it's that living long is not the same as living well. Last night, I looked at my own box for the first time in months. I didn't open it, but I reread the inscription. "The measure of your life lies within." Sure, it's pointing to the string inside, but maybe

that's not the only measure we have. Maybe there are thousands of other ways we can measure our lives -- the true quality of our lives - that lie within us, not within some box. And, by your own measure, you can still be happy. You can live well."

We live in a wonderful community filled with giving and thoughtful neighbors. This letter is certainly not meant to judge. But, if Frankl or Erlick or, simply, living in this post-pandemic era has challenged you to question your purpose, I ask you to make FPNA's Care & Compassion Committee a small part of the answer.

Time is the canvas upon which we paint the story of our lives. If Victor Frankl were alive, he wouldn't have told us what to paint. He'd have coaxed us to paint our own picture — but always with a strong, clear sense of purpose.

