



I'm thankful for: a caring community in my senior years

Dear <Mr. Sample>,

November x, 2021

I grew up in Budapest, Hungary and my early years of my childhood were as idyllic as anyone could hope for. My parents were good-natured and loving, and my father owned a knitting factory so we were financially comfortable. I grew up with two older sisters and spent summers when school was out at our family property located on the side of the Danube.

Unfortunately, the peaceful and carefree times didn't last. I was just 12 years old when World War II started.

Thankfully, I escaped being conscripted to the military by just one year, however I still experienced the violence of the Russian occupation. **We lost my father to the war – and life was never the same for my family.**

On my 20th birthday, I escaped the Russian occupation of my country and fled to Paris where I was able to get a job at a knitting factory. I later moved to Casablanca, Morocco where I found another job. My entire family followed me there and I spent my free time outside of work playing tennis for both exercise and friendship.

After 11 years in Morocco, I immigrated to Toronto in 1959. I spoke very little English, and knew almost nothing about Canada. Nonetheless, I was lucky to find a job shortly after my arrival as a salesman for a crystal and gift importer.

As you might imagine, life as a new immigrant felt very lonely at times. I asked my sister, who was more familiar with our new city, where I could play tennis and she mentioned the tennis club that unbeknownst to me, would change my future. It was through the tennis club that I met Barbara, the love of my life. We were wed two years later, and spent 60 happy years together.

Barbara and I were blessed with two children, a son named Andrew Jr. and our daughter Libby. Andrew Jr. now lives with me and helps in many ways and I speak with Libby by phone every day.

As we grew older, Barbara and I sought out opportunities to socialize and make new friends. **It was then that we were first introduced to Better Living Health and Community Services and attended some of their enjoyable parties.** Barbara loved to dance, and I was thankful to see her in her element.

Unfortunately, our life changed dramatically when Barbara was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. We spent the next four years not leaving the house much as her condition deteriorated.

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After 60 years of marriage, Barbara died at the end of December 2017. I was devastated to have lost my partner in life and constantly missed seeing her smile. I started to feel very isolated, which was made worse because I also lost several friends around the same time.

That's when I decided I would get more involved in my community by volunteering for Better Living Health and Community Services.

At 92 years old, I began driving for Meals on Wheels. I loved being able to help other seniors while also connecting with like-minded volunteers in the program. Though I had to stop my work in this role with the onset of COVID-19, I very much appreciated the time spent chatting with my younger volunteer partner. She helped to reduce my feelings of isolation and I'm happy that we stay in close contact to this day.

Once I started volunteering, I learned more about Better Living's many activities. I love that membership is open to anyone who is 55 or older. They do not pick and choose their members. That sense of belonging is very important for us all.

Many of the Better Living programs appealed to me, and I simply couldn't pick between them! I've now participated in a number of different programs including documentary film clubs; exercise and falls prevention classes; gentle fitness; Bingo; current event discussions; and virtual traveling. I've also enjoyed time spent with Vernon as he shared his technical knowledge about computers and photography, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention Men's Shed.

Men's Shed is a group of approximately 12 men who meet every week to chat about any topics of interest. I now consider Bryan, our leader, a personal friend. He prepares each week's discussion with care, and we're able to participate at no cost. Men like me are able to gather useful information, gain new friends, and get connected to health resources such as COVID-19 vaccine clinics.

While COVID-19 was a difficult adjustment in many ways, I've been able to continue participating in Better Living's programs virtually. My son helped me adjust to the new online platforms and I appreciate the chance to continue connecting with my community. Now that I'm 94, it's also helpful as someone with mobility issues to be able to log in from home rather than venturing elsewhere.

It would be easy to be really disconnected from the outside world when you spend as much time at home as I do, but thanks to Better Living Health and Community Services I don't have to feel alone. **I'm so thankful for the support I've found.**

I personally donate to the Better Living Charitable Foundation to express my gratitude for the programs that do so much to enhance my quality of life. With many in our community struggling with isolation, these kinds of programs are more important now than ever before – and there aren't many people as dedicated to helping others as those who I've encountered at Better Living. **I hope you'll choose to make a gift of your own today.**



Andrew Borbas

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