

# Examples to live by

By Julia Lee Ai Cheng

Dear Jim,

I have finally found some time to email you. During our conversation on the telephone on Tuesday, I was so surprised to hear that you now have an email account. Congratulations! Jim, this is the most delightful piece of news from you! That's a great start for the New Year! I hope you enjoy reading the rest of this email from me.

GRANDPA Jim turned 86 years old this year. How many of you have heard of 86-year-olds signing up for email accounts to keep up with the changing faces of communication? Well, there aren't many such Jims around are there?

Recently, when I gave Jim a call to wish him a Happy New Year, his parting line to me was:

"Don't forget to email me at [thesummerkitchen@mhtc.net](mailto:thesummerkitchen@mhtc.net), Julia." Jim stressed again, "It's [thesummerkitchen@mhtc.net](mailto:thesummerkitchen@mhtc.net)."

Jim is an American of German decent whom I met at the farmers' market in Wisconsin while I was a graduate student five years ago. After our friendly encounters, I became intrigued by Jim's approach to life.

I was wondering what was an old man doing working so hard. Despite his age, he looks forward to a full life. I was touched by what I saw. Touched because what I saw in this tall and chatty elderly man was LIFE.

As I got to know Jim better, I found out that he was at the market every Saturday without fail from spring until autumn, which is from about April until October before it gets too cold to be outdoors.

The usual scene at the farmers' market comprised a huge throng of customers lining up to buy Jim's homemade organic jams, ranging from strawberry to exotic fruit combinations that Jim concocted to perfection.

Jim would chat with every one of his customers as though they were old friends. He made everyone feel special. During the winter months when people are prone to the seasonal affective disorders (SAD), a form of depression, caused by the lack of exposure to sunlight during the winter months, Jim continues to live as if it's summer - Jim makes jams.

Jim is an example to live by.

What I have learned from Jim is that we must do what we love and love what we do. And Age? Age is simply a number. Emails? Emails are just part of change. And change? Change is constant. Therefore, keeping up with changes in our lives is just part and parcel of life!

Jim's sense of living life to the fullest within the space, time, and capacity allocated to him was something I used to ponder upon over and over again until it dawned on me that I too should live life to the fullest like Jim. Jim continues to live life to the fullest until today, evident from his recent signing up for an email account.

I know of another remarkable person who is an example to live by. Her name is Eileen. Eileen is a woman of Irish decent, also from Wisconsin. Despite having gone through two hipbone operations, Eileen never looked at herself as a sickly person but rather as a person who continues to give herself to others.

As a graduate student, I had the privilege to be invited to her home every month for lessons on spirituality and those sessions always ended with sumptuous meals despite her pain in the hip!

During the day, Eileen volunteered at the hospices near by and visited her children and grandchildren. Eileen accepts her suffering and she continues to serve others despite her very own illness. Eileen's sufferings did not hinder her from LIVING.

Today, Eileen continues to live in Wisconsin in a very simple house, a house which is really a home filled with warmth, love, and charity. Eileen focuses on others rather than herself and her own sufferings. Her exemplary living has given hope to others, like me, to be positive in life regardless of circumstances!

People whom we do not know personally may also be examples to live by. If only we care to see and look, we might find many such people around us.

A bus driver at the university where I studied would greet every single student-cum-passenger on board with glowing greetings of "How are you?" and "Good day" before they stepped on and off from the bus.

Though these seemed like short and mechanical greetings, his smile and simplicity in making others open up made me realise that a tiny positive act creates a mountain of positive energy at the end of the day.

These three personalities I have described share common traits. They live positive lives, they are contented, which then lead them to enjoy happiness, and they prove that character counts.

In life, we continue to learn from others, and others from us. We learn by examples. In order to live meaningful lives, we do need to ask these questions: Are we examples to live by? Do we realise that we leave footprints in the lives of people whom we meet? What kinds of footprints do we leave behind in the lives of others?

To end I would like to share this popular quote with you:

Sow a thought and you reap an act;  
Sow an act and you reap a habit;  
Sow a habit and you reap a character;  
Sow a character and you reap a destiny.

And that destiny is for us to become examples for others to live by. We are destined to be landmarks and compasses that inspire others to live positive and fulfilling lives! Be examples for others to live by!

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