

Wendy Metcalfe

VP Content & Editor in Chief

John Breunig

Editorial Page Editor

# You can live to 100, but you'll have to eat Brussels sprouts

Twenty years ago, I started collecting books about longevity, with such captivating titles as “YOU: Staying Young,” “Live Longer,” “Younger Next Year,” “Healthy Aging,” and my favorite, “The 17 Day Plan to Stop Aging.” The truth is 17 days later I felt 17 days older.

The authors shared their secrets about how to live a long, healthy and prosperous life. Well, maybe not prosperous, but I thought I'd throw that in to tempt you. Look at it this way: If you have longevity, you can keep working until 85 ... at least.

Since the books were filled with such great advice, I guess I should have read them.

On the other hand, by now most of those authors have probably passed into the Great Hereafter, so it's better I didn't waste my time. But what goes around comes around, and I'm at a place in life where I'm really looking for suggestions on staying alive, to quote the Bee Gees, gone but not forgotten.

You need to think about this stuff BEFORE you get false teeth, hearing aids and reading glasses. Don't wait to start flossing and doing sit-ups. OK, forget the sit-ups. At least get off the recliner and walk around the kitchen table a few times before you grab the beer and pretzels.

On my last visit, the doctor said, “You look good ... for your age.” But that glow doesn't last forever, so it's time to get to work.

In 2023, the U.S. life expectancy was 78.4. In comparable countries, it was 82.5. As one report warned, “The U.S. has the lowest life expectancy among large, wealthy countries while it far outspends them on healthcare.”

In my quest to discover the secrets to longevity, I took decisive action ... and bought more books. Twenty years later, there are new titles like “Spring Chicken,” “The Longevity Blueprint,” “Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity,” “Forever Strong” and “The Ultimate Guide to Home Repair and Improvement.”

OK, that last one was actually my wife's idea. She figures if I'm going to stick around until 100, I should be doing something productive and not just flossing.

I also bought “Into the Light: Real Stories about Angelic Visions of the Afterlife.” I got that just in case the other ones don't work.

You can never have enough unread books in your library. People see them and think, “Hey, this guy must know what he's talking about.” Let me reassure you I know what I'm talking about. Do you honestly think my editor would let me have a column if I didn't know what I'm talking about? No need to answer.

My father-in-law always said, “Joe, the first 100 years are the hardest.” And he almost made it. Until the end, he drove around in a baby blue Mustang convertible to attract the ladies.

I still haven't figured out whether the ladies help longevity or hinder it. George Burns, who lived to 100, once said happiness in life is “a good cigar, a good meal, and a good woman — or a bad woman. It depends on how much happiness you can handle.”

I've know a few centenarians. Our parish priest, Philip Brady lived to 103. My friend Lillian is 99 and on her way to the jackpot. Another fellow I know is 102 and drives himself to church and the golf course.

The good news is the number of Americans 100 and older is expected to quadruple over the next 30 years, from 101,000 to 422,000. The bad news is we're going to be fighting for seats in the gerontologist's office, so get there early.

Last week, I kicked off my crusade by exercising 20 minutes. I'm also committed to a healthful diet, inspired by the example of Bobby Kennedy Jr., who's known to devour a Big Mac or two for breakfast.

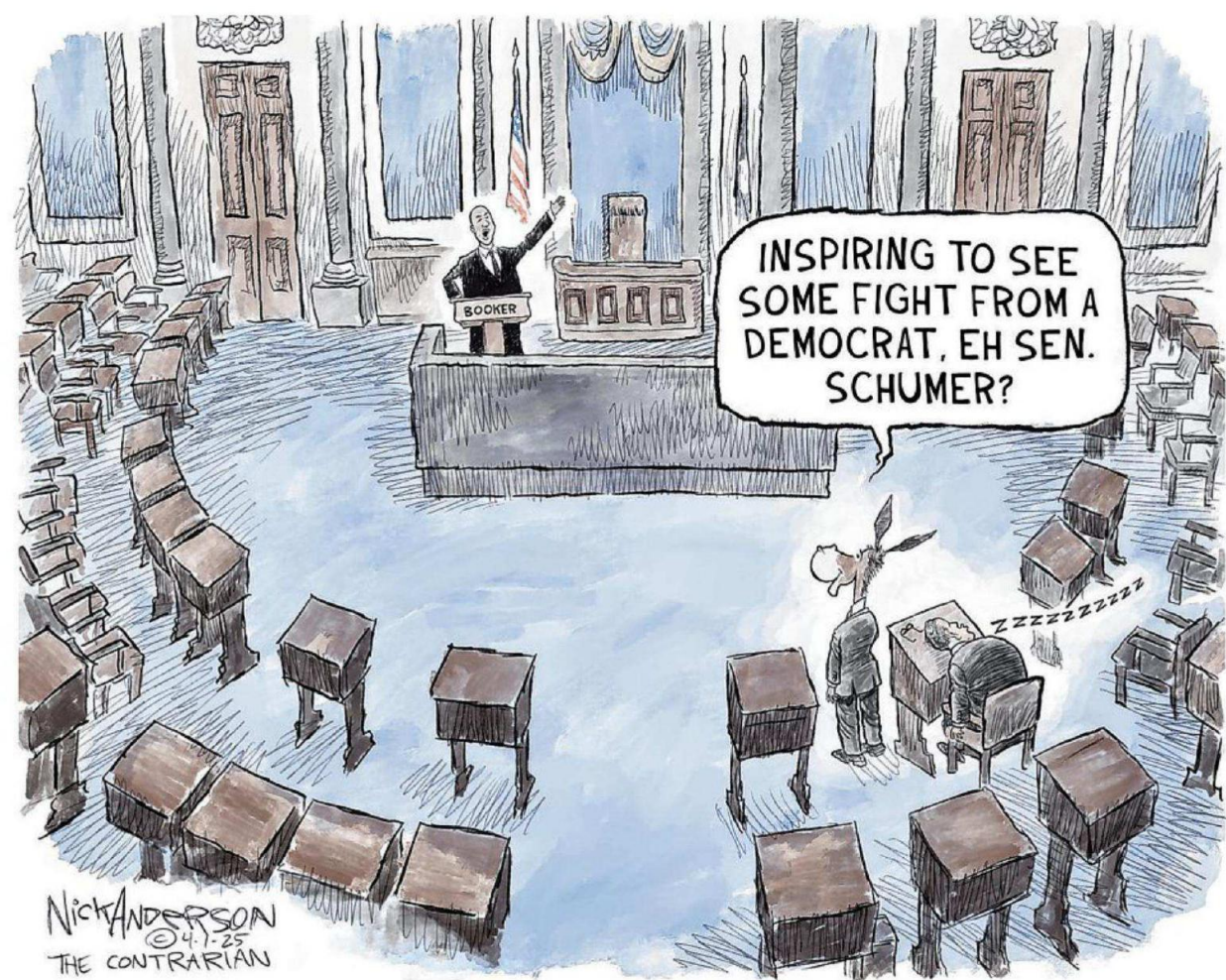
We eat organic around here, which means I spend a lot of time and money at Whole Foods, buying blueberries, matcha tea, almonds, protein shakes and cold-pressed juice, whatever that is. Since they don't have everything I need, I go to Walmart for my Twizzlers and Mike & Ikes.

The truth is I've seen some unhealthy looking people in Whole Foods, but I don't want to take their inventory.

As a reward to loyal readers, I'm going to share some tips, which will help you make it to 100, or pretty close:

- Get out of the recliner. Move around. Exercise 30 minutes a day.
- Eat your vegetables, especially broccoli and Brussels sprouts.
- Stop arguing about politics. Anger will put you in the grave.
- Have a bowl of berries every day.
- Give up the booze, marijuana and tobacco.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Reduce stress by meditating and doing deep breathing.
- Make a few new friends.
- Say your prayers.
- Live and let live.
- Drink matcha tea.
- Smile more. Joe don't want young people to think you're a grumpy Baby Boomer.
- In the evening, reflect on your day. Were you a force for good in the world, or for bad? Or were you a lump on the log, as we used to say.
- The truth is you don't have to make it to 100. Look for quality, not quantity. See you at the matcha bar. You're buying.

Former Stamford Advocate and Greenwich Time Editor Joe Pisani can be reached at joepisani@yahoo.com.



## WHERE I STAND

# Driving change in Yale's mental health policies

By Lily Dorman Colby

I write this amidst tears of joy and excitement, having seen the latest mental health and leave data released by Yale University for the fall of 2024. If you include the ripple effects, hundreds — or perhaps thousands — of lives have been impacted by the work of Elis for Rachael.

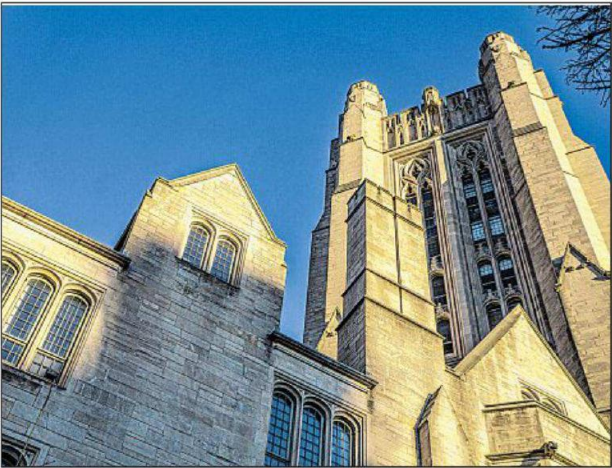
Last fall, 46 students applied and were readmitted to Yale from leaves of absence, and zero students were withdrawn involuntarily.

Prior to the settlement of our lawsuit against the university in 2023, Elis for Rachael, a nonprofit organization, heard from hundreds of students, alumni, and family members that it wasn't safe to share when they were struggling. Students and alumni were aware there were students who had been kicked out and never returned to Yale after they expressed mental health concerns — so there was a real fear, understandably, about whether and how much to share with Yale counselors and staff.

Although individual students were often afraid to share that the system was problematic, student groups banded together. Numerous student groups met with administrators, submitted reports about the problem and protested demanding change. Yale has had a long history of hearing from students that the status quo was not working. But for the most part, change was slow at best, and at times, non-existent.

But what if we created a movement?

In the spring of 2021, Rachel Shaw Rosenbaum died by suicide. She was not the first Yale student who had struggled with her mental health and was afraid of being kicked out of the university. I held the first meeting of Elis for Rachael because we needed time and a space to grieve. I was an advocate for social change in the foster care community but as a Yale alumnus who had lost friends to suicide, I cared deeply about this issue. I invited her family and other alumni to the meet-



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Yale University in New Haven.

ing, held in my Zoom room.

We knew we needed to do something about Yale's policies. In fact, our first meeting was titled, “Rachael and Alumni Responding to Yale's Rigidity.” But we weren't just a group against Yale's rigid policies. We became a group for mental health awareness, disability rights, and community support.

I took my toolbox of advocacy skills and shared them with the group. The core team of volunteers also schooled me on things I hadn't thought of. We got started with social media outreach, data gathering, interpreting the data we gathered, and even doing research into Yale's mental health policy history. A member of our team recruited alumni to share their own stories, and created the first fund for students to apply for support while on leave. We met with administrators, connected with journalists to let the world know what students were facing, and when change wasn't happening fast enough we ended up hiring a legal team to move forward with a class action. Together, we tackled the problems with Yale's mental health policies head on.

Our community continues working together to create change in very, very dark subject, but today we get to celebrate. It was known among students and alumni that there were many students who withdrew for mental health reasons and had applied to return but were rejected. Since data has been required to be released under

our settlement agreement with Yale University, as of the most recent numbers, 159 students have applied to return from leave, and all 159 students have been readmitted to Yale University. We heard that in the past, students were withdrawn involuntarily. Since our lawsuit, all four semesters of data released show that no student has been involuntarily withdrawn for mental health reasons.

I've talked to some of the students who benefited from the changes in policies. One student was away for over a decade and thought he would never return to Yale. He was living on SSI disability payments and started to believe that he was incapable of ever working. But today he's thriving. I love our little phone call catch-ups. He's made friends, he's a leader in multiple groups on campus, and he's excited about his summer internship plans.

Another student joined our discussion on campus about mental health and shared that she was one of the first students ever approved for part-time status under the new post-lawsuit guidelines. The process wasn't smooth, but it worked — and she was able to both work on her mental health and be involved in student life as a part-time student. The option to be in community and supported while getting treatment is life-changing.

For others, we've heard that the changes to the policies have had multiplying ripple effects. Not only have the changes

helped the students who have taken leave and their families and friends, but it has had an impact on students who have not taken leave. Just knowing students can take leave if they need it, and knowing the university hasn't placed students on involuntary withdrawal, students now feel a little safer sharing when they are struggling.

For students who left a long time ago and recently returned — they've shared that the new system isn't perfect — but the difference is like night and day. Before, they got emails saying they couldn't set foot on campus, participate in student activities or even access the library while on leave. Now they are invited back on campus with open arms and the university has even created mini-events and specific support for students who have returned from leave to be in community with one another and feel less alone.

In a sense, this mental health advocacy project that I helped to form — Elis for Rachael — became so successful our work's partially putting our part out of business. With so much positive change at Yale, we now we are fielding more questions from students around the country asking us how to change their schools' systems than we are hearing complaints at Yale.

We thought at the outset of our efforts that Yale was an immovable object, but ultimately realized that we were an unstoppable force.

At a time when it's easy to find things to be upset about, I'm pleased and proud to share some good news. As of this writing, more than 159 students, their families and their friends have been helped by our small group of committed Elis successfully pushing for change.

Lily Dorman Colby, Esq. of Elis for Rachael is the founder/CEO of With Lived Experience and has worked on foster care and education policy issues. She is a graduate of Yale University with a B.A. in Economics and has a law degree from Berkeley Law School. She can be reached at findus@elisforrachael.org.