

# SWELL LETTER

## March 2025 Volume 5, Issue 3

### **Finding Your Blue Zone: A Path to Longevity in Dubuque**

The quest for a longer, healthier life has captivated humanity for centuries. Recently, the concept of "Blue Zones" has emerged, highlighting regions where people consistently live past 100. These areas, discovered by Dan Buettner through a National Geographic expedition, share common lifestyle traits: physical activity, low stress, strong social connections, a whole-foods diet, and low disease rates. Can we replicate these conditions in Dubuque, Iowa, specifically within the SWELL program at the University of Dubuque? The answer is a resounding yes, by focusing on the three major health challenges that impede longevity: heart disease, cancer, and dementia.

### **The Centenarian Goal: SWELL's Blueprint for Longevity**

Our primary objective is to cultivate a community of centenarians within SWELL. To achieve this, we must address the leading causes of premature death and decline.

#### **1. Conquering Heart Disease: The Leading Killer**

Cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death globally, encompasses various conditions affecting the heart and blood vessels. From coronary artery disease to heart failure, the causes are multifaceted, including atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, obesity, and inactivity.

The Mayo Clinic outlines a comprehensive preventative strategy:

- **Quit Smoking:** Eliminate tobacco use.
- **Embrace Physical Activity:** Aim for 30-60 minutes of daily exercise.
- **Adopt a Heart-Healthy Diet:**
  - Prioritize fruits, vegetables, legumes, lean proteins, low-fat dairy, whole grains, and healthy fats.
  - Minimize salt, sugar, refined carbohydrates, alcohol, processed foods, saturated fats, and trans fats.
- **Prioritize Quality Sleep:** Ensure adequate rest.
- **Manage Stress:** Implement stress-reduction techniques.
- **Regular Health Screenings:** Schedule consistent check-ups.
- **Prevent Infections:** Take good multiple vitamins and maintain good oral hygiene.

#### **2. Battling Cancer: Lifestyle Matters**

Cancer, the second leading cause of death, is significantly influenced by lifestyle choices. Stanford Health Care and the World Health Organization emphasize that a substantial portion of cancer deaths are linked to modifiable factors like tobacco use, high body mass index, alcohol consumption, poor diet, and inactivity. With 90-95% of cancers being attributed to environmental and lifestyle factors not genetic, we must focus on minimizing exposure to toxins in our food, water, and environment.

#### **3. Safeguarding Cognitive Health: Dementia and Alzheimer's Prevention**

Dementia, an umbrella term for cognitive decline, is often caused by Alzheimer's disease. Research from the University of Nebraska Medical School highlights the role of stress in amyloid plaque formation, a hallmark of Alzheimer's. Conversely, studies from the National Library of Medicine suggest that compounds like green tea catechins and resveratrol may offer protective effects.

Harvard Medical School research emphasizes the benefits of exercise and meditation for brain health. Neuroscientist Dr. Sara Lazar's work demonstrates that meditation can alter brain structure, enhance memory, empathy, and stress resilience.

Furthermore, meditation promotes deep sleep, which aids in the detoxification of amyloid beta, a key factor in plaque formation in the hippocampus portion of the brain.

### **SWELL's Role in Building a Blue Zone**

By addressing these three critical areas, we can significantly enhance our chances of achieving longevity. This includes:

- Adopting a healthy lifestyle encompasses a balanced diet, regular exercise, and stress management.
- Cultivating strong social connections and fostering a supportive community.
- Prioritizing quality sleep and incorporating mindfulness practices like meditation.

As a SWELL instructor/supervisor, my goal is to empower individuals to embrace these principles and create a Blue Zone within our community. My current research focuses on the impact of meditation on stress reduction and brain detoxification through deep sleep, an area with immense potential for improvement.

Let us work together to make the Blue Zone a reality at SWELL and the University of Dubuque, fostering a community of healthy, vibrant centenarians.



Focusing on diet, minimizing toxin exposure, and meditation can make critical health improvements with our SWELL group.

**We are getting younger, let's get healthier.**

**-Gary**



## A Week in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Jerry & Kris Hermsen, along with Gary & Marian Conlon and three other couples spent a week in Punta Cana at the RIU Bavaro all-inclusive resort. We began our days by watching the sunrise over the ocean and then visiting the wellness center for our daily workout. We took many steps as we walked the beach and nearby resorts daily and enjoyed just people watching. With temps between 80 and 85 daily, the ocean and the pools were quite refreshing, and food and drinks were plentiful. We thoroughly enjoyed getting away from the snow and cold, seeing the beauty of nature and the time spent with friends.

We learned that the Dominican Republic is the only country in the world with a Bible on its flag and that it has the most Blue Flag beaches in the Caribbean. A Blue Flag beach is an internationally recognized award for a beach that has met strict standards for water quality, safety, and environmental education. The beaches were beautiful and the water was clear!



Photo submitted by Kelly Bergfeld

**SWELL's Praying Mantis Posture: 10-Second Challenge**

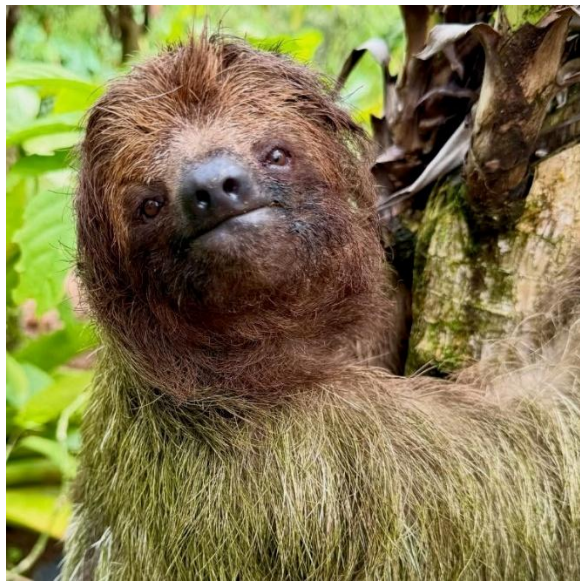
**SWELL members, observe the praying mantis: bent legs, focused stance. That's our goal! Adapt this form and hold it for 10 seconds.**



## Kari and Tony Zelinkas travel to Costa Rica



We, Kari and Tony Zelinkas, just returned from a two weeklong vacation to the Guanacaste Province in northwest Costa Rica. We flew into Liberia, a town of about 55,000 people and then took a ground shuttle to Tamarindo, a small but growing beach town located on the gorgeous shores of the North Pacific Coast. Tamarindo is a favorite spot of tourists and locals alike. We stayed in a condominium owned by our good friends Rick and Pat Engstrom, who have vacationed there for almost 20 years. Each day was sunny, with temperatures in the upper 80's to low 90's, and with relatively low humidity. The hot days were a welcome change from below zero temperatures in Iowa! Not having a car meant that we walked everywhere we went, which was great exercise since we were not doing our SWELL exercises! There were not very many sidewalks, but the city streets had little traffic, and it was only a 15-



minute walk to the shops, restaurants, and the beach. We often took walks to the edge of town looking for howler monkeys, as well as for birds and plants unique to the area. Most days were spent walking the beach, hanging out at a condominium pool, reading, and eating at some fantastic restaurants, but we did go on some interesting trips. Tony chartered a four-hour deep sea fishing tour. With the help of some Dramamine, he did not get seasick and managed to catch six beautiful tunas, each about 15 pounds. Two of the tuna were yellow-fin tuna that made excellent



sushi and tartare, prepared for us at a local restaurant on the beach. We also went on a boat tour in an estuary waterway, seeing small crocodiles, many species of herons (wading birds), mangroves, a family of mangrove raccoons, and troop of howler monkeys. We also went on a day long tour that included a swim below a beautiful waterfall (no crocodiles), a visit to a coffee and chocolate plantation, and a nature walk. Costa Rica is famous for its 3-toed sloths, colorful tree frogs, poisonous snakes, and we were fortunate to see several of these on our guided walk, as well as three species of toucans. Our trip was memorable, and we hope to visit other parts of Costa Rica on a future trip.

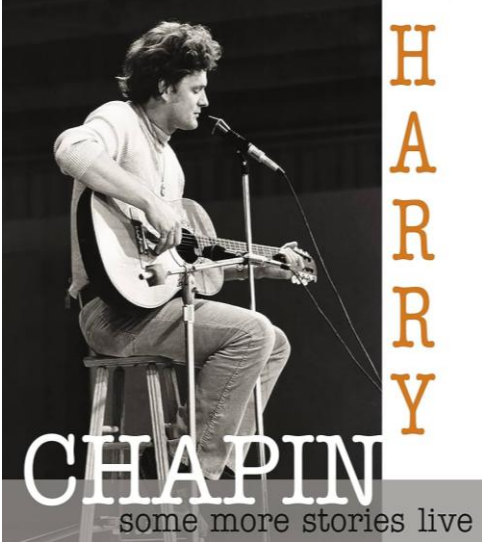




## Fifty-Plus Shows and Counting: Linda and Randy Glass's Musical Adventure

Linda and Randy Glass, true music lovers, have kept the concert spirit alive for decades. At the beginning tickets were under \$10.00. Linda's journey began with Harry Chapin at Senior High, while Randy's was a headbanging introduction to Black Sabbath at Loras College's Field House for \$6.50. Since joining forces, they estimate they've

attended over 50 concerts – a testament to their shared passion. With two more shows already on the calendar, their love for live music shows no signs of slowing down. Linda's heart belongs to the soulful melodies of James Taylor, while Randy is a devoted Dixie Chicks fan.

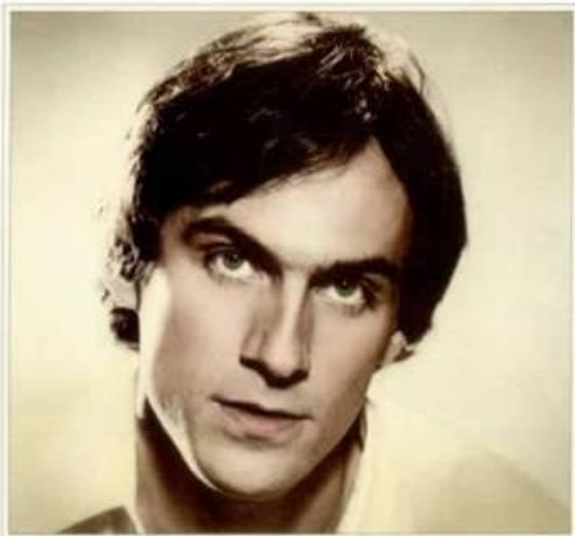


**Young Ozzy Osbourne**

They happily support each other's musical preferences. Their upcoming concerts include Charlie Parker in Stoughton, Wisconsin, and "A Beautiful Noise: The Neil Diamond Story" in Madison. Among their most cherished memories is Brit Floyd's performance at the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Morrison, Colorado. Linda dreams of seeing David Gray there someday, while Randy fondly recalls George Thorogood and the Destroyers at the Ryman in Nashville. They were fortunate to catch Tom Petty and Joe Walsh at the Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines just a week before Petty's passing, a bittersweet memory. Eric Clapton has graced their ears four or five times, solidifying his place as a favorite.

Their concert experiences haven't all been conventional. At Farm Aid, seeing Willie Nelson, Linda found herself battling nausea from the pervasive pot smoke. They've seen Brit Floyd and Willie Nelson play at Farm Aid multiple times. They also count Lyle Lovett among their best concert experiences and recall Ringo Starr and his All-Starr Band performing alongside Willie.

**JAMES TAYLOR**  
— *Classic Songs* —



**James Taylor winked at Linda; she's been in love ever since.**



**That's ok Randy has a thing for the Dixie Chicks.  
-Gary**



## St. Patrick's Day Treat Apple Crumble Bars



*These sweet homemade apple crumble bars are a delightful dessert recipe from the Irish kitchen.*

**Cook Time** 50 minutes

**Total Time** 50 minutes

**Yield** 20 – 25 bars

### Ingredients

- 2 cups of flour (spelt, white, or oat)
- 1 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 3/4 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2/3 cup maple syrup
- 3/4 coconut oil or almond butter
- 3 tbsp milk of choice or additional butter
- 3 1/4 cup diced apple (2 large or 3 medium)
- 1 tbsp cornstarch or arrowroot
- We doubled the recipe

### Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 350 F. Stir the first five ingredients together, then cut them into butter or stir in the oil. (Also add an additional 1/4 tsp salt if using oil or unsalted butter.) Press about 2/3 of the dough firmly into the bottom of an 8×8 pan lined with parchment paper. Toss the apples with the cornstarch and liquid sweetener, then spread this over the crust. Sprinkle the remaining dough evenly over everything and press down. Bake 50 minutes, then let cool before slicing into bars.

The coconut oil version of the apple crumbled bars (which is shown in the photos) will be crumblier, so I recommend chilling the bars before cutting for cleaner slices.



## Up coming performances at the Heritage Center

### 1. University of Dubuque Fine Arts Department Spring Musical: Assassins.

- Date: Saturday, March 22nd, 7:30 PM
- Location: Heritage Center, Vineyard Section
- Cost: \$5.00 per person
- Payment: Please submit \$5.00 per person in a sealed envelope with the names of attendees clearly printed on the outside.
- Deadline for Payment: Friday, March 14th (collected during class).
- Ticket Distribution: Tickets will be returned between Monday, March 17th, to Friday, March 21st.
- Note: After March 14th, tickets must be purchased individually at the Heritage Center ticket office.



### 2. U.S. Army Field Band & Soldiers; Chorus Concert

- Date: Saturday, March 29th, 7:30 PM
- Location: Heritage Center
- Tickets: Four (4) free general admission tickets are available per person at the Heritage Center ticket office.
- Recommendation: Secure your tickets promptly, as availability is limited. I have already obtained mine.

### Important meditation and sleep audio tracks to reach the “Blue Zone.”



Research from the Cleveland Clinic shows that meditation can help you achieve deep, delta sleep. To maximize your chances of reaching this restorative sleep stage that eliminates Amyloid Beta that makes plaque that causes dementia, the Cleveland Clinic recommends:

- A consistent bedtime routine
  - A relaxing, dark, and quiet sleep environment
  - Avoiding stimulants like caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime
  - Regular exercise (but not too close to sleep)
  - Relaxation techniques like meditation or deep breathing
- Tension Zen Mind and Body on Patreon offers 2 audio tracks to help you sleep better including the 20-minute meditation experience after lunch daily and the 7-minute Tension Zen Deep Sleep Experience when you go to bed and repeat if you wake up at night to go back to sleep.

**Our Tension Zen meditation app is available on Patreon!**

For just \$1 a month, you'll gain access to a wealth of resources designed to improve your physical and mental well-being.

<https://www.patreon.com/TensionZen>

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**Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter.**