

Gratitude — We Need It Now More Than Ever

By Rev. Laura L. Mancuso, MS, CRC

Given the devastating tragedies of recent times, it may be tempting to view gratitude as naïve or even Pollyannish. Yet I would argue that cultivating gratitude is now more important than ever.

Gratitude is more readily accessible when times are easy and requires greater effort to summon when times are tough. Yet doing so can help us stay balanced enough to plan a productive course of action. It can give us a sense of agency in a troubled world and help us avoid falling into immobilizing despair. Gratitude strengthens our resolve to make the world a better place. And it can show us the truth—even in the darkest moments, there are inspiring examples of courage and heroism giving us reason to remain hopeful.



Activist and author Joanna Macy writes, “In times of turmoil and danger, gratitude helps to steady and ground us. It brings us into presence, and our full presence is perhaps the best offering we can make to our world.”

How do we promote gratitude when it feels like the world is falling apart? The most common practice is a gratitude journal. Each day, write down three things you feel grateful for. It takes just a few minutes and requires only paper and pen. There are also smartphone apps for this purpose. Keeping a gratitude journal brings our attention to positive aspects of our lives that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

It makes sense that focusing on the positive makes us feel more upbeat. But did you know that it can also lead to improved health? Researchers Robert Emmons (University of California at Davis) and Michael McCullough (University of Miami) are the most prolific researchers on the health benefits of gratitude.

In one of their experiments, subjects were divided into three groups and asked to write down five things each week: blessings, hassles, or life events whether negative or positive.



Rev. Laura L. Mancuso, MS, CRC

After ten weeks, those who wrote about their blessings were found to be 25% happier than those in the other two groups. They were significantly more optimistic, felt better about the future and their lives, did almost ninety minutes more exercise per week, and had fewer visits to physicians.

Continued on page 4

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In this issue:

From the Editor's Desk.....	2
Rising Prostate Cancer.....	2
New Covid 19 Vaccines	3
Gratitude – We Need It Now More Than Ever continued from page 1.....	4
Poetry Corner	5
Staying Young At Heart	5
Dancing With Time !	6
Alienated Grandparents Support Group	6
Part two ~ Oprah's List: Best Books to Comfort a Grieving Friend	9
Making the Most of Aging.....	10
Cox Communications Offers Low Cost Options for Internet Service.....	11

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Justine Sutton

Cultivating gratitude in difficult times seems extra-challenging, but as Laura Mancuso shares in our cover story, it is good for not only our mental but also our physical health and can be as simple as keeping a gratitude journal.

I have found this a satisfying practice—writing down five things each day I'm grateful for. They're often simple, like my cat sleeping peacefully next to me or a phone call with a friend. Sometimes they're bigger, like gratitude for those who are saving lives and helping people in dire crises around the world.

Attention to gratitude can make all the difference. When my mother was coming to the end of her life, her cancer support group leader suggested listing everything they didn't get to do during their lives. "I started to make that list," she said. "But it made me too sad. So instead, I made a list of all the things I *did* in my life, and then I got to revisit those wonderful memories."

We all know the Thanksgiving tradition of going around the table and sharing what we're thankful for. This is lovely but see if you can make it a daily practice. Whether you will gather with others for winter holidays this year or your table is set for one, find things every day to be grateful for.



This "attitude of gratitude" doesn't mean we should never think about the difficult parts of life, but regular focus on the positive helps counteract feelings of despair and overwhelm. It can also help us feel more satisfied and capable in our everyday lives, in turn improving our relationships with others and increasing our sense of connection and community.

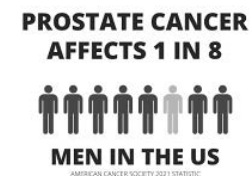
As also stated in our cover story, "Gratitude strengthens our resolve to make the world a better place."



Rising Prostate Cancer Rates Cause Concern

By Betsy Bates-Freed

Welcome news from the American Cancer Society's 2023 annual report: overall cancer mortality continues to decline. There has been an especially profound drop-off in cervical cancer deaths and an overall 33% reduction in deaths from all forms of cancer, 1991-2019.



Not such good news is that prostate cancer, already the second most common cancer in men, showed case numbers rising 3% each year, 2014-2019.

"The increasing percentage of men presenting with advanced prostate cancer, which is much more difficult to treat and often incurable, is highly discouraging," said Karen E. Knudsen, M.B.A., Ph.D., chief executive officer of American Cancer Society, in an official statement.

At times mischaracterized as an insignificant disease, prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men, behind lung cancer. It can be difficult to diagnose and resistant to a wide array of treatment options. All efforts, however, are made to spare men unnecessary side effects of treatment, including impotence and incontinence.

For now, the American Cancer Society recommends that average-risk men begin weighing the potential risks and benefits of screening with their physicians at age 50, with men at high risk having this discussion earlier.

There is, however, some encouraging news. Scientific developments are on the horizon, including more sensitive and specific blood tests, capable of identifying genetic biomarkers that better determine individuals' cancer risk.

New Covid-19 Vaccines: What to Know for 2023-24

By Judi Shor, CSA Counselor

Welcome back and Happy Holidays!

With the approaching winter season, it's time to explore the current senior Covid vaccine options.

Although Covid cases have become less common, people aged 65 and older and especially over 75, are most at risk of severe Covid outcomes. Waning immunity from past boosters and Covid infections as well as the possibility of passing Covid to vulnerable others are excellent reasons to schedule one of the current vaccines. If Covid booster fatigue is an issue for you, speak to your healthcare provider for further counsel.

Although the virus continues to mutate, the current vaccine recipe appears to be a good match against circulating and emerging Covid strains. Protection starts about two weeks after the vaccine with maximum immunity occurring in the first three months. There is growing evidence that the Covid vaccine may offer protection from the disabling symptoms of Long Covid. The hope is that Covid vaccine immunity will eventually last a year, offered on an annual basis along with the flu shot.

Studies show that receiving two or even three vaccines at the same time does not lessen the potency of each vaccine, though there are two notable exceptions. The Mpox (monkeypox) live vaccine should be spaced apart from other vaccines by four weeks. The other is the new RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccine. As it's new this season, eligible recipients may want to space it out from other vaccines by two weeks. The separation or bundling of most vaccines is a personal choice, as is the decision to have multiple vaccines in one or both arms.

Currently, all of the vaccines in the inset above appear equally effective. However, after four years of Covid, multiple mutations, and inconsistent vaccinations, distinguishing true vaccine effectiveness from natural immunity has

Like the flu vaccine, the new Covid XBB.1.5 monovalent vaccine is universally recommended.

Although it will not prevent all cases of Covid, its aim is less intense illness and hospitalization. Vaccination is recommended at least two months after any prior Covid vaccine, in the fall to extend maximum immunity through the winter months.

The 2023-24 vaccines are Medicare-covered and include Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech, both mRNA technology vaccines.

Novavax, a traditional protein-based formulation, currently requires one dose if previously vaccinated and two separate doses for individuals never before Covid vaccinated.

IMPORTANT TIPS:

- Anyone with a weakened immune system or chronic conditions such as COPD, heart disease and diabetes, should seek guidance from their doctor regarding the benefit of additional doses of any of the current vaccines.
- Those with a history of particularly uncomfortable or strong vaccine reactions may opt to space out these vaccines instead of getting two or three at once.
- If you've recently had Covid, you no longer need to wait several months post-infection to get the new vaccine, especially for high-risk older recipients. Check with your doctor for the optimal timing of your post-Covid infection vaccine.

become largely unverifiable. That said, the benefits of vaccination continue to outweigh the risks of developing a Covid-19 infection.

Side effects appear to be similar to the previous Covid vaccines, a sore arm the most common. Serious allergic vaccine reactions are fortunately rare and occur in one or two people per one million doses. With the mRNA formulations, and less prevalent with protein-based Novavax, there is a rare risk of heart inflammation, which has necessitated an FDA warning. It is important to note that a Covid infection can lead to the same heart issues, with one study showing heart inflammation from Covid to occur 5.6 times more often than from the vaccines.

Pain and swelling at the injection site can be treated with an ice pack. Possible effects for all new formulations are headache, muscle pain, fever, and nausea, which should all subside in

a few days and may be relieved with NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents) such as ibuprofen, aspirin or acetaminophen (Tylenol), as directed by your healthcare provider. Excess fatigue should be eased by a few days of rest.

As the new Covid vaccines are administered to the public, data and recommendations will evolve. This phenomenon has been referred to as a "moving target" of knowledge. As always, access the CDC and WHO websites and your healthcare provider for the latest, most accurate Covid-19 information.

Dr. Judi Shor, PharmD, CMC, is a 15-year CSA volunteer and operates a Senior Care Management practice. Questions may be directed to her at ShorCare@gmail.com



Gratitude — We Need It Now More Than Ever

Continued from page 1

Another study measured the effects of keeping a daily gratitude journal on the well-being of those with post-polio syndrome. After just 21 days, those who wrote down what they felt grateful for each day were more optimistic and had more energy, a sense of feeling connected to others, and greater satisfaction with their lives overall compared to the control group. They also slept longer and felt more refreshed upon waking. That's a whole lot of benefit for adopting such a simple and pleasant habit.

We needn't wait weeks or months to realize the benefits of gratitude but can practice it moment to moment. Some situations make it easy to feel grateful. If one has been enduring tooth pain, it's easy to feel grateful after a remedy is found and the discomfort has ended. We may continue to experience the sense of relief for a few days. The late Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh advised us to go further, suggesting we could summon gratitude when not in pain. "Can we be grateful for our non-toothache?" he asked. Adopting this mindset, it quickly becomes clear that there are many things to be grateful for in every moment.

Take a few minutes now if you can—close your eyes, scan your body, and offer gratitude for all the parts actively sustaining your life... your liver, your skin, your nervous system. Consider gratitude for your senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, even if diminished somewhat from prior years. They still enable vital connections with your environment and your loved ones.

Expressing our gratitude to others is another strategy. It only takes a few seconds to compliment a server for their efficiency or friendly attitude. Gratitude for the actions of a family member, friend, or neighbor can be expressed in a phone call or message sent by text or email. Hand-written notes are especially treasured now that they have become rare. We don't even need a particular reason to tell the people most important to us how grateful we feel that they are in our lives.

But how do we transform suffering into gratitude? Emmons has discovered what he calls a "redemptive benefit" to revisiting unpleasant memories. Rather than just venting about the feelings from the incident, he encourages people to actively look for meaning in the experience and contemplate how far they've come.



His prompts for redemptive contemplation include the following:

- What lessons did the experience teach me?
- Can I find ways to be thankful for the experience now even though I was not at the time it happened?
- What surprising ability did the experience draw out of me?
- Because of this experience, how am I more the person I want to be now?
- Has the experience removed a personal obstacle that previously prevented me from feeling grateful?

Finding gratitude in the face of individual and world-wide adversity is not easy. When negativity threatens to overwhelm us, it's tempting to take the road more often traveled—that of regret, rage, and despair. But we can make the choice instead to intentionally and continuously choose gratitude. We should be patient with ourselves as we travel this path. It takes time to form new habits yet the rewards are great.

As long as we are alive, we will add years to our lifespan, but not all will achieve wisdom. In addition to bringing positive attention to small moments in life, a practice of gratitude can help us to derive meaning and insight from our most difficult experiences, the ones that teach us lessons and build character. This is the difference, then, between those who grow in maturity with joy and those who merely add candles to their birthday cake. Which would you rather be?



Rev. Laura L. Mancuso, MS, CRC, is the Spiritual Life Director at Vista del Monte. She holds a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and is an ordained interfaith minister. In response to a mid-life calling to end-of-life care, she completed seminary training and worked as a Spiritual Care Counselor at Hospice of Santa Barbara before coming to Vista in 2014. Laura is committed to honoring all faith traditions, as well as the spiritual paths and life philosophies of those who do not adhere to any religion. Vista del Monte is a not-for-profit, multi-level retirement community serving residents in independent and assisted living as well as memory care. Learn more about Vista at www.vistadelmonte.org

Poetry Corner



She remembers their life together

By Grant House

She remembers their life together
Rich and round and fertile
All the joy and grieving
Hopeful and unfolding
Years of learning how
To be with one another in a kind way
Respect and longing
Other lives before they ever met belonging
To their pasts unmentioned
Each one at first the center of their own attention
A special bond earned day by day
Night by night
Side by side
The sea they crossed together deep and wide
She remembers when the changes came
So small and hardly worth attention
Too small to mention
Their enduring love and affection
Sunset shadows on a wall
Vivid memories come to call
Their life together's day blends into night
Was it worth the fight
Reason enough to keep on living
So much taking but most of all the giving
Sun sets
More shadow now
She remembers all those years
With smiles and tears
And wonders how
The coming night becomes tomorrow



Staying Young at Heart

By Leslie Sokol

As I always say to my students, “*Age is just a number.*” Don’t let your age hold you back! As you get older, it is essential to keep your body moving and active through regular exercise.

Physical activity is the cornerstone of healthy aging, increasing alertness and energy as well as keeping you fit and strong. Scientific evidence suggests that people who exercise regularly not only live longer, but also have a higher quality of life with less pain and diminished chance of disability.

A good fitness routine includes three components: stretching, strengthening, and aerobics.

Stretching: The three L’s, longer, looser, and limber, are how you want your muscles to be. Stretching increases your range of motion and reduces your chance of injury. You become more flexible, which allows you to move faster, easier, and more freely. It also enhances good posture and body placement.

Strengthening: Strength training is crucial for building muscle mass. Building muscles helps support your joints and prevents injury. It is also better to have more muscle than fat because muscle burns more calories, even when you’re not exercising.

Aerobics: It’s critical to care for the most important muscle in your body—your heart! Aerobics is any exercise that gets your heart rate up (i.e., walking, dancing, swimming, seated exercise) and is an absolute must for any fitness routine. This type of exercise helps strengthen your heart and lungs and increases the level of oxygen in your blood. Aerobic exercise also releases endorphins and can often be a social activity with others, helping you to feel happier.

In my next article, I will provide examples of exercises for each of these components so you can achieve balanced fitness. Remember, the best exercise is always the one you enjoy the most! Our bodies were made to move—sound body, sound mind!



About the Author

Leslie Sokol is the creator and founder of the adult dance and fitness program *For the Young at Heart*. She has been teaching adults and children for forty-five years. You can watch *For the Young at Heart* by visiting her YouTube Channel or on TVSB. She also teaches in retirement communities throughout Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties.

For more information contact Leslie at Dancekidsfun@gmail.com 805-312-8089 or visit the website: www.LeslieSokolDance.com

Dancing With Time!

By Beth Amine

I'm Beth Amine, welcome to my new column, *Dancing With Time*. I'm so honored to be here with you in the Center for Successful Aging newspaper. In the last fifty years as a multi-media artist here in Santa Barbara, I have encouraged thousands of individuals to find and express their unique essence as it evolves through their lives.

What does Dancing With Time mean? It's joyful timeless living! It is liberation from the traditional approach of seeing movement through time as a downward spiral. It's saying, "I'm not young, I'm not old, I just am."

Dancing With Time is a playful approach to life, re-interpreting your aging story, not seeking to be young but rather to live in a timeless dimension. Dancing is a metaphor for this flow, unimpeded by fear.

Self-care and self-love are a big part of this approach and have a lot to do with the quality of our thoughts. It takes bravery to let go of the illusions we create, so often reinforced by our culture. It is about finding, living, and evolving your unique value.

This is the joy of being fully engaged in the present moment with a roadmap of new desires, but unattached and non-resistant. In other words, just having fun!

To explore the present moment, start by asking these questions:

- What am I feeling now?
- What do I desire right now?
- How can I be kind to myself right now?
- What thought can I choose to make me happier?



Beth leading the warm-up for the Alzheimer's walk

Join me and meditation expert Patti Teel in our weekly fun and informative podcast, *Dancing With Time!*

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and at national podcast portals.

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Order my book, *Joyous Every Day Living*, on Amazon or get a personalized copy from me. Email joyousmovement@gmail.com with book orders and any questions or discussion.



Alienated Grandparents Anonymous Offers Support Group



The Center for Successful Aging is teaming up with Alienated Grandparents Anonymous to offer a support group for grandparents having difficulty connecting with their grandchildren.

Studies show the best form of help for those suffering from complicated grief, grief without closure, is to attend a peer-led support group.

Meetings are held at 11am on the 3rd Saturday of each month at the CSA offices, 232 E. Anapamu St., SB. All are welcome.

For more info, call Nancye at (510) 993-6553.





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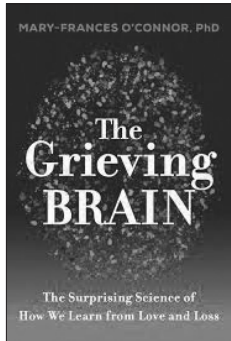
PEARLS is a nationally renowned, evidence-based coaching program that teaches skills to manage difficult feelings and improve quality of life.



Part two ~ Oprah's List: Best Books to Comfort a Grieving Friend

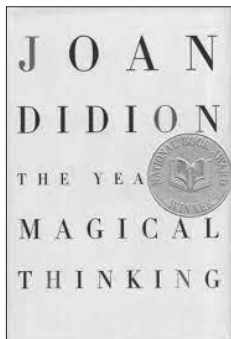
It can be hard to know how to comfort a grieving friend—particularly when grief is so *uncomfortable* for so many of us. Grief is long, intense, unexpected, and sometimes impenetrable—it has its way with you, not the other way around. One salve is to find words that mirror your own experience and normalize your pain. There's every type of read below, from memoirs about loss written by both the dying and the bereaved to guidance from those who have helped innumerable people go (and talked to them on the other side).

The Grieving Brain, by Mary-Frances O'Connor



Neuroscientist Mary-Frances O'Connor studies grief and the brain, specifically, why it's so hard for us to process the loss of a partner. Part of this, she maintains, is that an essential part of our mental map—our person—is missing, and in the quest to locate them, we feel perpetually shocked and surprised that they're gone. As she explains, "Even when a person has been ill for a very long time, no one knows what it will be like to walk through the world without this other person. My contribution as a scientist has been to study grief from the brain's perspective, that the brain is trying to solve a problem when faced with the absence of the most important person in our life. For those who want to understand what's happening to them and why grief is so confounding, this is a fascinating and comforting read."

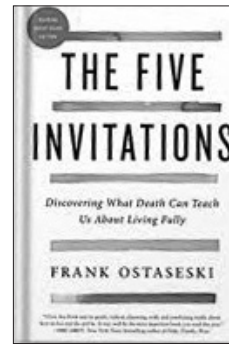
The Year of Magical Thinking, by Joan Didion



In 2003, Joan Didion's daughter, Quintana Roo, fell ill with pneumonia and went into septic shock and an induced coma. A few days later, her husband, John Gregory Dunne, died of a heart attack. Quintana passed a few years later, after an unending medical nightmare to which her mother bore witness. Didion, one of America's most revered writers, documents her grief in this now classic, paying tribute to her marriage all while trying to hold on to her child. As she

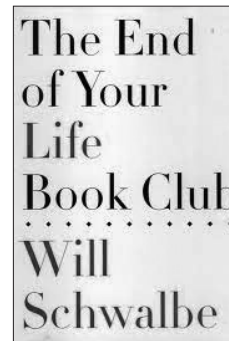
writes, indelibly, "A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty."

The Five Invitations, by Frank Ostaseski



As cofounder of the Zen Hospice Center, Ostaseski has sat bedside with thousands of people at the end of their lives—and comforted those who sat with them. In *The Five Invitations*, Ostaseski offers five key teachings from his vast experience, namely, how to use death and its corresponding grief as an opportunity get bigger, rather than restrict. As he writes, "I have seen ordinary people at the end of their lives develop profound insights and engage in a powerful process of transformation that helped them to emerge as something larger, more expansive, and much more real than the small, separate selves they had previously taken themselves to be. I have witnessed a heart-opening occurring in not only people near death, but also their caregivers. They found a depth of love within themselves that they didn't know they had access to."

The End of Your Life Book Club, by Will Schwalbe



Beloved book editor Schwalbe's mother passed away from pancreatic cancer in 2009. But before she died—with no clear understanding of how much time they might have—Schwalbe and his mother started a book club of two, using their favorite books as a prism for talking to each other about their lives during her chemo. If you love literature, their selections and insights will give you years of reading in fellowship. But even if you don't, this is a beautiful memoir about saying goodbye, and the enduring power of mothers.



Making the Most of Aging

By Diane Blau, PhD

Attitude is everything. It colors how we experience life. There is no surprise that thinking positively can enhance an upcoming event while a negative stance typically generates dissatisfaction and disappointment. An intentional change to positive perspectives contributes to greater acceptance and an increased sense of well-being for everyone.

Here are some new ways to think about aging that offer personal qualities to embrace:

- **ATTUNEMENT**
An attitude of acceptance of struggles occurring in the present, generating a sense of harmony with your environment
- **RECOGNITION OF EARLY INFLUENCES**
Awareness of the significance of individuals and environments in the past that played a key role in your development
- **CAPACITY TO FEEL FORTUNATE AND GRATEFUL**
Mindful appreciation of your positive life experiences, past and present
- **PURPOSEFUL MAINTENANCE OF WELL-BEING**
Your focus on physical and mental health, nutrition, exercise, sleep, and selective social interaction
- **AVOIDANCE OF NEGATIVE INFLUENCES**
Limiting exposure to negative situations, creating healthy boundaries
- **ACCEPTANCE OF PHYSICAL CHANGES AND MORTALITY**
Awareness and understanding of the aging process
- **RESISTANCE TO STIGMAS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING**
Making choices based on self-knowing and personal preferences
- **FINDING MEANING IN LIVING**
Seeking out and enjoying activities that most resonate with you



Incorporating some or all of these qualities into your life is by no means easy. We all know that the older we get, the more set in our ways some of us become. However, with intention, we can embrace new viewpoints and options to implement positive change. This, in turn, can lead to more positive outcomes and enjoyment of day-to-day living.

References: Flewelling, R. (2008). *A different senescence: The experience of transcending the expectations of aging by individuals 80 years of age and older* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Michigan School of Professional Psychology.

Aging is not lost
youth but a new
stage of opportunity
and strength.

Betty Friedan

Cox Communications Offers Low-cost Options for Internet Service



There was a time when the over-65 set was viewed as feeble, fragile, or frail. But today's seniors shatter those stereotypes — they say 80 is the new 60! People are living longer and are more active and engaged than ever before.

Connection to others and participation in daily life are critical to overall health and well-being as we age. Yet, two in five U.S. seniors lack access to high-speed internet at home. Disconnection from loved ones and lack of access to important health or financial information means less independence for seniors, many living on fixed incomes.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), in an effort to close this digital divide through partnership with the federal government and Cox Communications, provides eligible households with a discount of up to \$30 per month for high-speed internet.

Some seniors may even qualify for free internet by combining ACP's discount with one of Cox's low-cost options:

ConnectAssist is an affordable internet plan costing households \$30 a month for service. If seniors qualify for the ACP discount of \$30 a month, that discount applies directly to their bill so that each month they pay nothing for home internet.

StraightUp Internet is a prepaid plan which costs households \$50 a month with no term agreement or credit check required. It also provides flexibility so seniors pay as they go and can turn service off and on easily. Combined with the \$30 ACP discount, the monthly cost is only \$20 for these households.

In addition to these affordability programs, Cox's free online Digital Academy offers a variety of information, on everything from internet basics to educational resources.

Visit www.cox.com/digitalequity to learn more about these programs.



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The mission of the Center for Successful Aging is to promote the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of seniors and their families.

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- JAN 2nd Curated Transitions w/ Karen Martin
- FEB 6th Stress and Mental Health w/ Kathy Langsam
- MAR 5th Lindsey Leonard w/ Alzheimers Association
- APR 2nd Care for the Caregiver w/ Jeanne West

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