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Reflections through a Wide-Angle Lens: Embracing What Matters

Married for more than 61 years, Robert and Julia Kellejian taught, traveled, raised four children, and continue to live purposeful, engaged lives.



Earlier in their lives, they were also exposed to unique experiences that helped shape who they are today. In their mid-eighties, Robert notes, “Aging has substantially slowed us down, but we’re still productive!” Julia shares, “We help others. We maintain our lives and health, and we maintain our connections with family and others.”

A Whirlwind Romance

After emigrating to Canada from England, Julia traveled with her mother in 1961 to visit family in California for Christmas. Little did she know, but a cousin had “planned an evening meeting between me and a special young visitor and his family.

Under such circumstances, I was somewhat reluctant to be ‘prodded’ upon...until I heard the young man’s deep baritone voice that attracted my interest... on subsequent dates, I learned that ‘Bob’ was kind, generous, and thoughtful and possessed qualities of morality, integrity, and honesty that overwhelmed my perceptions of ‘spoiled American rich kids.”

Robert was “the fourth child of immigrant parents who escaped the Armenian massacres in Turkey that began in 1914. The familial influences upon my upbringing taught me to be honest, hard-working, competitive, and frugal.” He describes Julia’s values as very similar to his.

Robert recalls, “Meeting my future wife, Julia, was not just circumstance; it was a ‘set-up’ arrangement wherein family elders conspired on our behalf... I was informed that there was a suitable young woman that I was to meet, and the next move was mine if we ‘hit it off.’” Robert and Julia were engaged within three months and married six months after they met.

Robert’s Journey

A Budding Musician: Robert was initially “attracted to playing the trumpet” as a youngster. At eleven, he earned a “superior” award at a county musical festival. As a freshman in high school, he

was awarded first chair in the trumpet section of the school band. “I also played in two adult bands through my teen years. As an adult, he played in a swing band and had other ‘gigs’ over the years.

Photography and a ‘Photo Chat’ with Ansel Adams:

During high school, Robert “pursued photography in earnest, building a darkroom and assembling an enlarger in our garage in Fresno.” Because Robert’s brother was working for Ansel Adams, sixteen-year-old Robert had an opportunity to meet this iconic American photographer and environmentalist. “Adams was kind enough to share photo ‘chat’ that was quite motivational for me.”

Robert minored in his creative interests in college, and, along with music, photography became an enduring avocation. “Photography evolved from film and chemical technology to an electronics technology over the years. Once retired, Robert “had the luxury of being fully immersed in both ways of creating images.” Now, he also uses computer software to manipulate images “beyond what could be accomplished in the darkroom. Applying this computer technology has imposed learning experiences that keep my mind active—a bonus I had not anticipated.”

Pathway to a Career: As a teen, Robert was also drawn to radio electronics, and television. At fifteen,



he was employed to install TV antennas, which then led to becoming a television service technician. While attending college, “television repair technicians were in demand.” By the end of his junior year, he had an opportunity to teach at a trade school. The following

year, he had a full-time high school teaching position. Then, while completing a “short active-duty service in the National Guard,” he undertook a two-year electronics teaching assignment at San

Francisco State while finishing his studies for a master’s degree at twenty-four.

‘Family Trumps Ambition’: After getting married, “I began a 30-year teaching career at the College of San Mateo,” but better yet, I began a 61+ marital career that includes extended family and fulfillment beyond what even the best good fortune can provide.”

Robert was working on his Ph.D. at Stanford when his first child was born; “that was the end of my academic pursuits.” Instead, he took on additional assignments to support his growing family.

“Motorhome travels were our most rewarding family life experiences; so much so that we continued that activity...into retirement.”



Julia’s Journey

Childhood Memories from World War II:

Julia was six years old when she and her family “huddled in the underground ‘subway’ stations in London to escape the bombs, and later in the suffocating small bomb shelter dug by my father in our garden. I’m still wary of confined or dark spaces, including elevators and darkened auditoriums.”

Later, Julia and her mother “were evacuated to Wales to reside with a couple as unwelcome guests in their sparse, unheated attic...I cannot forget the straw mats, two meals daily of bread soaked in milk and sprinkled with sugar, and being turned out of the house from morning until evening.”

When Julia and her mother returned to London, “we saw devastation everywhere, and our former home

had been bombed and flattened.” Fortunately, her father and brother had survived.

After the war, Julia’s parents entered a partnership to run a guest house and café “on the Isle of Wight, a tourist destination off the South Coast of England.” With all the pressures of this new venture, her parents were overwhelmed and divorced when she was twelve. After the divorce, Julia began working in the guest house and outside the home to help support her family. She finished school at fourteen.

Night School and New Opportunities:

Julia completed night school classes in her late teens and became a secretary. After additional education, she started working as a legal secretary. Through hard work and ongoing academic pursuits, she continued to advance. By age 21, she had “completed seven years of full-time employment.” When she moved to Montreal with her mother, she found a “choice job” since bi-lingual secretaries were in “high demand.” (She spoke both English and French.)

Parenting, Teaching, and Volunteering:

Though her work was in demand, and she was skilled, Julia wanted to make a difference in the lives of children as a teacher. After she was married, she began taking education courses.



Then, she and Robert started a family—a significant new focus in her life. When her youngest of four children started kindergarten, she became a kindergarten through eighth-grade teacher. Later, she worked with children who had learning challenges.



support groups.

When she was nearly fifty, Julia started volunteering to help others. Some of her volunteer work has included working at hospitals, being an assistant Chaplain at Feather River Hospital, and leading Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s

After moving to Southern Oregon, Julia continued her volunteer work through church ministries and helped establish a new “Loving Hands Ministry,” as well as continuing to help young children.

Enjoying a Fulfilling Life in Retirement

“Julia has assumed the role of landscape manager,” and I [Robert] have “become a home maintenance manager. These roles require time, energy, resourcefulness, the proper use of a myriad of tools, and, of course, access to YouTube videos.” The Kellejians stay connected with family and continue to travel. They have also made five post-retirement visits to England, Scotland, and Wales. Robert reflects on their travels as giving them “valuable insights into geography and humanity that we wouldn’t otherwise know.”

Robert and Julia continue to use their many experiences and areas of expertise to help encourage, support, and bless others. Robert shares his photographic talents with others to enjoy; these artistic gifts are true treasures. He has also volunteered to help people in his community with various projects. Julia continues to connect with her community and regularly checks on people by phone or in person. They also spend as much time as possible enjoying each other’s company and connecting with family.

Enduring Advice

“Family trumps ambition.”

A Prescription for Healthy Aging?

Gladys McGarey is a 102-year-old physician and author of [The Well-Lived Life: A 102-Year-Old Doctor's Six Secrets to Health and Happiness at Every Age](#). She claims the most important thing we can do for healthy aging is to connect with others. And, we are “[happiest and healthiest](#)” when contributing to and drawing from our collective communities.

Thanksgiving and the Power of Gratitude

In just over a week, on November 23rd, many American families and friends will gather to celebrate Thanksgiving. As families and friends gather around dinner tables, many may offer Thanksgiving prayers and may choose to go around the table and encourage participants to express something they are thankful for. Others may share what they have with their homeless community members or may gather at soup kitchens to serve meals to those who might otherwise go hungry.



gratitude

Beyond Thanksgiving Day

While setting aside specific days to express thankfulness can be meaningful, practicing gratitude regularly can be genuinely transformational. To experience this power, the Mayo Clinic states that “gratitude should be practiced daily.” [UCLA Health](#) suggests using a gratitude journal and writing down something each day. [Harvard Health](#) suggests writing thank you notes, remembering to count your blessings, and expressing gratitude through prayer and meditation are meaningful ways to experience improved health and well-being.

Improved Health and Well-Being

A 2021 [Harvard Health article](#) reports that gratitude

“helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.” In one [study](#) that involved journaling about things

participants were thankful for two weeks before Thanksgiving, results indicated a higher degree overall of



happiness and satisfaction. Citing a 2021 review of relevant research, another [article](#) pointed to evidence that gratitude may improve sleep, reduce depression, and lower blood pressure. Further, gratitude can help improve [heart health](#) by lowering “biomarkers of inflammation.” A [Mayo Clinic article](#) adds that expressing gratitude can also reduce chronic pain and improve our immune responses.

A Six-Week Challenge: 15 Minutes a Day

From [UCLA Health](#), “Research shows that practicing gratitude 15 minutes a day, five days a week, for at least six weeks can enhance mental wellness and possibly promote a lasting change in perspective. Gratitude and its mental health benefits can also positively affect your physical health.”

It is not difficult to practice gratitude for a total of 15 minutes throughout the day when we develop the



habit of pausing and appreciating all the joy and kindness that comes into our lives—the caring people, the warmth of a hug, the pleasure of watching a sunset, the memories of special people in our lives—past and present—and so much more. For those not already in the habit of expressing gratitude throughout the day, a

[thankfulness checklist](#) and [TED Talks](#) on gratitude might provide some inspiration.

Honor, Recognize, Appreciate

November is National
Native American Heritage Month

Thanksgiving Celebrations and Traditions

After the Pilgrims endured an arduous journey on the Mayflower and arrived in Massachusetts in 1620, they faced challenges of harsh conditions, including an epidemic that swept through the colony. According to [History News](#), “Some 78 percent of the women who had arrived on the Mayflower had died during the first winter, a far higher percentage than for men or children”.

Because of an English-speaking Native American named Tisquantum (“Squanto”), who had once been enslaved, the Mayflower settlers [learned](#) how to find food and fertilize their crops with fish.

In 1621, the “Pilgrims [celebrated](#) their first harvest of corn and barley with a festival of thanks. The 50 remaining colonists and roughly 90 Wampanoag tribesmen attended.” A peace treaty had been signed earlier in the year. The tribesmen brought much of the food and continued to be instrumental in teaching the Pilgrims how to survive.

No native women and only four Pilgrim women attended. With the likely help of some teenage girls, the [women did the cooking](#). Instead of roasting turkeys and baking pumpkin pies, the women were likelier to have prepared venison, ducks, lobsters, and fish over open fires.

Current Day Thanksgiving Traditions

Some of the [most popular](#) Thanksgiving traditions today include eating a traditional Thanksgiving meal, watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, watching an NFL football game, and preparing for a shopping weekend from Black Friday to Cyber Monday.

The meal: The traditional Thanksgiving meal often includes turkey with stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and gravy, and green bean

casserole or other side dishes. For dessert, pumpkin pie is one of the

favorites for many Americans. As for added calories, [Consumer Reports](#) suggests that the average number of calories consumed during a Thanksgiving meal is 3000-4500!



The Parade: The [Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade](#) has been an American tradition since 1924. Floats in the parade included popular nursery rhymes like “Little Red Riding Hood.” Live animals were also featured on some of the earlier floats.

Football: According to [NFL Communications](#), 44.1 “average viewers watched Thanksgiving Day Football” last year. Here is the schedule for this Thanksgiving:

- The **Green Bay Packers vs. Detroit Lions** game will begin at 12:30 p.m. ET on FOX.
- **Washington Commanders vs. Dallas Cowboys** will start at 4:30 p.m. ET on CBS.
- The **San Francisco 49ers vs. Seattle Seahawks** will begin at 8:20 p.m. ET on NBC.

Shopping: As reported by [CNBC](#), approximately “196.7 million shoppers” hit the stores and searched online for bargains from Black Friday to Cyber Monday last year.

Happy Thanksgiving, Everyone!

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