

## Ideas About Self-Care

*Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas*

Life is hard these days. Our NAMI families are loving, grieving, and coping with relatives who have mental illness, all within the context of a world in various kinds of chaos and upset. So, the August 27 Speaker Meeting was a 90-minute session of sharing about what makes us smile or grin or chuckle ... anything that brings the stress level down and is a distraction. There was no “formal” presentation, just an opportunity to listen to and/or share what and where we find small bits of fun. Participation was open to all, including non-NAMI folks.

The evening started off with one person’s story about there being so many dull-colored cars—black, white, silver, gray—on the road. So, while she’s driving, she claps every time she sees a bright-colored car, especially blue ones (but not red, because she drives a red car). If she can’t clap, she sings “Tra-la-la.” And that exercise makes her happy.

Music was a big part of many people’s source of comfort, especially making it: playing an instrument, joining a chorus, and taking lessons. One person mentioned joining the Berkeley Women’s Community Chorus, which does not require an audition. Another went away to Piano Camp in Maine for a month in the summer. Just working through the melody, chords, and fingering of a new piece of music was stimulating and yet relaxing.

Several people mentioned watching episodes of favorite television shows, including earlier *Star Trek* series and some long-running British soap operas.

Two people discussed taking classes in and practicing martial arts, such as karate and *qi gong*. Another soothing practice was meditation. And a third person like getting a foot massage, or reflexology.

One man who is retired went back to work, applying at Trader Joe’s because he loves the people and their friendly attitude.

Journaling first thing in the morning after waking, writing three pages of whatever comes to mind, was another calming practice a person described.

Common chores and hobbies were also discussed: knitting, baking, pulling weeds, and sorting laundry. One woman said she folded socks, then sat on the edge of the bed and threw them across the room into the sock drawer to relax. Others solved crossword puzzles and played Wordle.

Several people said they watched a nest of bald eagles at a local cemetery.

Finally, many people favored laughter and watching old comedy shows. One person mentioned the character in Joyce Cary’s novel *The Horse’s Mouth*, who was lying on his deathbed laughing. When he was told he should be praying, the man said laughing was the same thing. Another member said she never goes to bed sad.

“This is really stupid,” as one person said. “But if you like it, keep on doing it.”

And another said, “You have to find joy every day.”