

I have known Jim Qualls for a long time, first as a fellow athlete, then through our mutual profession and more importantly, as a close friend and a caring person. In *Take Care of Yourself*, Jim covers many truths about living that we all know are important and in a manner that is vulnerable by way of his own experiences. He helps the reader realize that, *yes*, I can do this. I can hear Jim's voice so clearly, as if we were having a one-on-one conversation.

*Deb Kalish*  
*Attorney*

Jim Qualls has succeeded as a family man and community leader. In *Take Care of Yourself*, he provides insight from important life lessons. In 2017, Jim unfortunately was diagnosed with cancer. We rapidly got to know each other. In minutes, I realized how focused he was on taking care of himself. He understood that treatment would be challenging, but he wanted to know how treatment would affect his exercise, nutrition, and singing. Jim clearly is not "the worst waste of six feet," but a man who understands the importance of life. Here he writes a down-to-earth "novel" that allows you to better understand yourself, and through this process how to improve your relationship spiritually and with others.

*Trevor Feinstein*  
*Oncologist, Piedmont Cancer Institute*

In today's fast-paced, stressful world, everyone is looking for answers to calm the mind, center the spirit, balance one's emotions, and strengthen one's overall physical well-being. *Take Care of Yourself* presents a chapter-by-chapter blueprint through relatable personal stories, perspectives, and sound guidelines to "better the odds" that we can in fact take better care of ourselves and find the overall well-being we want. There are no guarantees in life, but if followed, this book will guide one to an improved state of well-being and support by building better relationships with self, others, and one's community. In short, let Jim lead the way!

*William Ott*  
*President, PEAC Ventures, Inc.*

Jim brings a lifetime of valuable and varied experience to *Take Care of Yourself*, and it shows. Applicable and relevant from beginning to end, the heartwarming stories in this book are chock-full of encouragement and good advice.

*Matt Sapp*  
*Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Newnan, Georgia*

Jim Qualls writes about living an “intentional” life, what’s important and how to choose to spend one’s time. In a world that has too many inputs, Jim’s essay topics are sure to give great guidance in how not to just float through life, but to get great joy and fulfillment.

*Parks W. Avery*  
*Certified Financial Planner®*

*Take Care of Yourself* is the thoughtful advice of one whose family of origin positively impacted him. The family lived on and loved the land and operated a local store. Jim obviously has a firm foundation he seeks to share. The key word in the title is care, and the essays admonish us to care about how we might best thrive not only as individuals but also as world citizens. Faith informs the living and writing as Jim Qualls lives out his advice, “take care of yourself.”

*Menlia Moss Trammell*  
*Retired English Teacher*

We are blessed to have Jim Qualls in our lives. When he visits us at our cattle farm and plops into one of the rockers on our front porch, our worldview automatically goes positive. As we catch up on family news and share in warm conversation, his upbeat attitude just takes over. No problems, frustrations, or bitterness can thrive when Jim is around! This book will allow you to pull up your rocker and get to know the man we love and admire: the kind, compassionate man who authentically wants to help others lead healthy, joy-filled lives. We urge you to take his advice and become your best self!

*Rita and David Brown*  
*Retired Farmers*

Take Care  
of Yourself

*Essays for Life*

Jim Qualls

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*Life nowadays rushes by faster than ever.*

# Introduction

I was never one of those people, but maybe you were. In high school, they could do seemingly anything athletic and academic. They were popular, promising, and the “Most Likely To.” I still admire who they were to some extent. But 20 and 30 and 40 years go by, and things go all sorts of ways.

Some of those overachievers have done exactly that. Some of them have not surprised me at all: they’re accomplished, fulfilled, even pillars of the community who are making the world a little better. Others who seemed so promising have fallen on hard times in careers, health, or relationships. Some died robbing a store. Still others who weren’t the most beautiful or advantaged have bloomed of their own accord. They look better than ever (maybe we’d just overlooked their beauty back then), they’re solid citizens, and they’re living happy lives.

George Strait had a hit song titled “She Let Herself Go.” That phrase is often uttered after high school reunions. And it’s not just her; maybe we guys earn that remark more than the girls do. It’s so easy to fall apart in adulthood—and I don’t just mean regarding physical appearance.

Life can be cruel. People can be cruel to each other. We can be cruel to ourselves. But it can turn out better than that.

When I was in high school I did pretty well, but I wasn’t one of those super athletes or in the Beta Club or in the Alpha Club. I was even told that I was the worst waste of six feet that ever graduated from my high school! I found my own niche, however, through the choral department mainly.

The years went by, and I walked in with my wife at my 20-year reunion. It was fun to see everybody. That was before Facebook, before we could search and lurk and at least scope out our classmates to see how they were doing before the event. I’d been living well away from my hometown and had only seen a handful of classmates since graduation. Nobody knew me as I walked in. I had to introduce myself. It wasn’t weight gain so much. I’d lost my hair, gone bald. “Jimmy Qualls? Wow!” But really, I enjoyed the reunion.

Let me make one thing clear that some readers may wonder about: Being “the worst waste of six feet” to ever graduate from my high school

never bothered me. I've told that story over and over for years with no pain inside. The guy who said it was a friend, short in stature but a gifted athlete at whatever sport he played. I admired him for that, and, I guess, for at least a second, he thought of what he could do with six feet. I was happy with my niche, my course, my life as it played out, my selfhood. I still am.

Not everyone can say that. That's part of why many of us "let ourselves go." Living daily with gnawing dissatisfactions within takes a toll. Making a living, raising a family, dealing with distractions and troubles and things we do to ourselves and that others do to us can add up.

So, everything I wish to share in this book comes down to this simple phrase, one simple exhortation I'll repeat often: Take care of yourself.

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Obviously, there are reasons why I want you to read about taking care of yourself. It's because it matters to me. It's because I see people who have largely avoidable problems. It's because of the people who've inspired me. It's because I've faced some challenges and successes in self-care in my own life.

There are numerous aspects to taking care of yourself. It's not just about one thing or another. I don't claim to be an expert, but I've learned some things that I want to share with you. There's more than what I'll say here, so it won't be exhaustive on any particular subject and I hopefully won't subject you to exhaustion. I hope this all helps you.

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Who's got time to take care of themselves? The rush of life is like a kayak in a stream. You have launched into the stream, and life nowadays rushes by faster than ever. You may or may not be aware of the speed of the current. It gets away from most people. Unless you are aware and intentionally navigate, life will get away from you. Today you're 25; tomorrow you're 50. You wake up and wonder how that happened. I hear it all the time. I thought it was just something people said when older people told me life flies by. It's true.

Make your life the best it can be by living right now in the healthiest way possible—healthy in every sense of the word. Don't tell yourself you'll do it later. Don't let anyone lead you into lifestyle choices that are unhealthy.

Take care of yourself in every way now.



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I was born into a much slower and quieter world. The year 1961 was much faster and louder than 1928 when my parents were born, but compared to today, it was very different. There were millions less people, millions fewer cars and homes and fast food restaurants. There were no video games, no portable devices by which to play music in your ears, and certainly no phones without cords in your hands. It was just a different world than now.

How we played as children was very different from today, especially for me being fortunate enough to grow up in a very rural place. Nowadays, children have to be little geniuses and super athletes by the time they're six. Stop and think about the children you know and all their involvements. Many parents run themselves ragged making it all happen.

We run through middle school and high school and into early adulthood at a furious pace. I marvel at teenagers with their long daily schedules. I want them to have more time in their lives. Between a full day at school and a load of often endless homework while also being involved in a myriad of activities, the offerings and pressure from adults to keep saying yes to yet another activity seemingly have no limit.

Much of this busyness comes from adults anxiously repeating that we must keep kids busy to keep them out of trouble. Being choosy and thoughtful about it all rarely gets considered. Parents long for more family time together, yet many, even most, jump on the merry-go-round of out-of-control activity. There is precious little opportunity to keep balance.

Author Bill Donahue, in an August 2018 article in *Outside* magazine, wrote about his Catholic cleric uncle who moved to a little French village to live a simpler life. Donahue said, "Very few people are able to transcend the rat race with sustained elegance." So, what will we do? Or, will we just be done unto by time, society, stress, and the elements? It's up to us.

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I've always heard people speak of the inevitability of decline—physically, mentally, spiritually, relationally. I've listened countless times as they've told me how it would happen and that getting old is not for sissies and is not fun. I understand much of this, as I've seen older people battle some inevitables. I've been involved with and helped care for older people who've certainly

and understandably felt worn and defeated by physical and other difficulties. Those battles are not fun.

I've watched many of those older people over the course of more than 50 years. I realize that some of the things we face are beyond our control, some are of our own doing, and some are because we could have done better. More importantly, there are things we could and should be doing to help ourselves and to help all of us. Some decline is not inevitable. Some of it is inexplicable. Some of it seems cruel. But we can better our odds.

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Many of us hope we could just die in peaceful sleep at a ripe old age. Others say they hope they die doing some fun, favorite thing. I've declared that I hope to be found 95 and toothless behind my barn in the mountains of Georgia on a cold, crisp winter day. My wife says I won't be toothless!

Life has proven to me that we don't know the physical challenges we will face. But I must say how I am inspired to do better to take care of myself. First, the more I learn about health, and as findings are challenged and confirmed, the better I can do. And, I am inspired by people who are taking care of themselves physically at all ages, but especially the older they are. I want to be like them: I hope you do, too. By taking care of ourselves physically, the better are our odds as time passes. The benefits are well documented, and more so all the time.

Take care of yourself.

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There are people who've always been in my life, whom I've known and loved, who are now facing various types of mental decline. It's tough to see. I also see others who are not nearly as old and wonder what they're doing with themselves. I see people who cannot seem to find their way out of a wet paper bag. I see people who seem to be wasting their lives away, and sometimes wasting my time as they do. Quite often they'll say that's what's happening.

This is not to say anything about people with mental handicaps, who deserve our most compassionate responses. In fact, I would emphatically say that whether mentally handicapped or not, all people deserve compassion.

I wish to focus on what most of us can do to foster our mental and emotional health. What can we do to better our odds mentally and emotionally?

I'm inspired by people older than I am who, even in retirement and later years, have so much on the ball. Whenever I see them, I pay attention and try to emulate their wise, timeless, vibrant ways.

I'm inspired by young people who've wasted no time getting on a healthy track, who've learned to read and hunger for knowledge and truth. They've set out with an orientation that, if they'll keep to it, it will benefit them.

I'm inspired by middle-aged people like me who still have a lot of living ahead and haven't checked out already. I've also been inspired, or motivated, by people I've encountered who've sadly died inside way too early.

There are so many means for turning to anger, sarcasm, selfishness, negativity, and "stuck-ness." We can feast on these things for many reasons. We can in turn make it much worse by abusing alcohol and drugs—and I would add food, hatred, self-hate, abusive relationships, patterns of "drama," and on and on.

On the other hand, thankfully, there are healthy, freeing ways to choose and emulate. It's important to seek out, understand, and incorporate healthy ways into our life—the sooner, the better.

Take care of yourself.

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I saw it play out in front of my eyes even in my childhood—people in my life who crashed and burned. I learned early that not everybody loved each other at home, at church, in the neighborhood, in society, or in a war-torn world. Men told me authoritatively as they sipped coffee at my dad's store that relationships would usually sour. They didn't use the word relationships, but they told me it just apparently had to be. Their pontifications were full of sarcasm, as the pain they'd experienced colored the way they saw the world.

For a kid who would have told you in second grade that he wanted to be a wolf biologist, I've instead spent more than 40 years working with people. College education, graduate studies, continuing ed, and "people jobs" all these years have given me a front-row seat on the all-too-common heartache of relational decline.

North of 50 years old now, I can authoritatively say that I've never bought into the inevitability of relational decline. Sarcasm just isn't a steady diet for me: I've seen what such a diet has done to maybe even much of our population.

Take care of yourself.

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It's easy to get jaded in this life. Don't let it happen. Ours is a divided era. I can't walk into work or church or a civic or family gathering without being immediately aware that there are different, even polarized, perspectives around the room. While I've developed my own opinions on many things, I'm quite certain my methods for developing these opinions have evolved. I want to be more objective and considerate than I've ever been, because more than ever I believe "the truth will set you free." And, so, I cannot let sarcasm and bitterness and prejudice tell me that everything inevitably will go downhill. Some things are better. Some things need fixing.

I've always been involved in bringing hope to our world. An initial little boy's wish to be a wolf biologist has turned into a lifelong in-depth study of our natural world and involvement in environmental conservation, even though I missed a turn and didn't quite make it onto *Wild Kingdom*. And, all these years of "people work" haven't soured me. Instead, I'm more sure than ever that with one word, one deed at a time, we can do the better thing in our society and our world. It's not "dog eat dog." In taking care of those around us, we in turn take care of ourselves.

Take care of yourself without being selfish.