Thank you, Rani.

The GIA annual conference is always a special experience, but this year is a little *more* special... in a few ways.

This is, of course, our first VIRTUAL conference. Thank you for being part of this great experiment and keeping a valued event going strong, in spite of the pandemic.
This is also my FINAL conference as CEO, after eight action-packed years, lots of meaningful work and many wonderful shared experiences.
In a role like this one, retirement doesn’t just happen overnight – it’s a process.

As most of you know, I announced my intention to retire three years ago, and that will be happening at the end of this calendar year.

We have used that time to sharpen our strategic plan, ensure that all of GIA’s operations are at the highest level, and recruit our wonderful new CEO, who you will meet tomorrow.

In all of that time, I have had the honor and privilege of
working with the best staff anyone could ask for.
A big part of that process for me personally has been moving to Austin, Texas, where I am today.

My husband Steve and I are in our newly built house and back in my home state, and I have recently joined the faculty of the School of Social Work at the University of Texas, my alma mater.
While I’ll be leaving the very active role of CEO, I continue to care deeply about aging and philanthropy and so I DO plan to stay involved, serving on the boards of Archstone Foundation and Engage, Inc., writing, speaking, and teaching – and maybe even doing some consulting work!

And of course, I’ll be cheering all of YOU on as you continue your good work.
I began working in aging almost 40 years ago.

What I thought I’d do today is offer a few reflections from that experience, distilling what I – and WE – have learned, into “5 lessons from 40 years.”
Even for those of us who are immersed in this work, certain fundamentals of aging are important enough to repeat.

Right now, you and I are living through one of the most significant demographic events in human history: the PERMANENT aging of our population.

Think about the entirety of human history and ALL those who have lived to be 60 years old. HALF of those people are alive today.

With the aging of the Baby Boomers -- the generation born after World War II and of which I am a part -- this process
has been ACCELERATING. So by 2050, older Americans will make up 21% of the population.
But after the Boomers, come the “Millennials” – those born from about 1985 to 2000.

THEY have now taken over as the largest generation in US history, and just as the Boomer generation starts to end, the Millennials will begin to turn 65.

ANOTHER reason why the aging of America is PERMANENT.

HOWEVER, this aging trend may not always look the way we - or others - EXPECT. For example ...
The fastest growing segment of the aging population is Latinx or HISPANICS.... even though we continue to think of this as a “younger” demographic.
This is the first generation of LGBTQ older people who have lived a significant part of our lives “out of the closet.”
This is also the most DIVERSE generation of older people in US history - not only racially and ethnically, but in terms of wealth and poverty, health issues, and economic opportunity.

But while the details of this historic demographic shift may be a bit surprising, the fact that it IS happening really should not be.

After all, we have known this huge generation was coming for 60 YEARS.

So of course, we have done ALL the things we needed to do
to prepare, right?

Unfortunately, NO.
For as long as I have worked in aging, I have heard assurances that demographics would INEVITABLY change the way we looked at aging.

The popular phrase was “demographics equals destiny.” But it did NOT HAPPEN.

YES, In the 1970s and 1980s, there WAS a period of huge federal investment. But it did not CONTINUE.

TODAY there are FEWER geriatricians than in 1990. There are FEWER academic gerontology programs.
The same trend applies in PHILANTHROPY. Despite the demographic shift and the hard work of GIA, philanthropic giving specifically in AGING is less than 2% of US giving -- the SAME as it was 25 years ago.

And today, FEW funders see themselves primarily in aging -- and that is why as GIA members are so invaluable and special

Which brings us to Lesson #1
Demographics alone have not – and *will not* – drive increased concern for the aging population

For many of us, that still comes as a shock.
Why is aging so HARD to SELL?

It also raises the question -- If we know that aging is profound and permanent, why is aging STILL so HARD TO “SELL”? 
I’m happy to say we’ve made some progress in unpacking that question, through research by the ReFraming Aging initiative, which has been supported and put to work by so many of you.

Using social science techniques to explore our society’s PERVASIVE AGEISM has yielded some important results.

We learned more about the prevailing attitudes about aging (which range from sentimental to indifferent to just plain bigoted)

But we also learned about the “frames” – the unspoken
assumptions and biases -- that most people bring to the aging conversation, without even realizing it.

And by the way, this often includes aging PROFESSIONALS.
These negative frames are profound and deep.

The key obstacle is *an out-of-date and imbalanced view of today's older adults,*

Tropes like “Greedy Geezers,” hoarding wealth rather than sharing with other generations .... or the SILVER TSUNAMI, construing older people as a sudden destructive force – causing a natural DISASTER in which everyone dies.

Is that what we REALLY think of aging?

There is also the widely held – but FACTUALLY INCORRECT --
view that the majority of older adults are frail and in need of significant support.

It’s a dichotomy that defies logic -- people are somehow either playing GOLF and going on CRUISES, or they’re disabled, depressed, and forgotten.

We KNOW that this is not what aging in America is today.
As we continue to explore this, we can see, and help others see, that older adults are not “OTHERS” – they are US.

We can push back more effectively against implicit or overt ageism, because we have the tools to build a better frame.

It will take time and a major effort to make this change. I am proud that GIA members have done so much to support and implement this important new concept.
LESSON #2

Aging is a hard sell, but we can – and must – do better

So, YES, aging really is hard to sell.

But we can – and must – DO BETTER. In part because the need is so real and so urgent.
Almost any area of program work impacts – and is impacted by – aging.

So how do we broaden support and enthusiasm?

One important approach is -- instead of focusing only on aging -- to look at what is CURRENTLY being done in other fields, but through an “aging LENS.”

Just as the grandmother is using a camera lens to focus on her granddaughter, we can use the aging lens to not only better understand health care or transportation or housing, but also to engage funders in those larger fields to pay
attention to the needs of older people.
GIA continues to use the aging lens to connect with other fields not always thought be ‘aging.’

We have championed and educated ourselves and others on a number of important issues, bringing attention to:

- HIV and aging
- the aging experience of racial and ethnic minorities
- to people with complex health and social needs
- and to the unseen struggles of people with serious illness, at the end of life – and their caregivers – who are often also older themselves
Another example is RURAL AGING.

This is NOT a star map – it shows (in green) the officially designated RURAL areas of the U.S. Even in a major city, you are ONLY one or two counties away from a rural area.

Yet across philanthropy, there is very little emphasis on rural aging.
I am proud that GIA has been able to use the aging lens to draw attention to a fast-aging rural population by addressing challenges like social isolation and loneliness, and the opioid epidemic...
... and rural transportation and mobility.
Aging can be a lens to connect with and engage partners who will never think of themselves as ‘aging funders.’
As we broaden the aging horizon, we keep asking ourselves:

- How can we make communities better places for ALL people to live?
- Can we create communities for those who are younger AND who are older?
For GIA, much of that work has been around creating Age Friendly Communities.

The essence of this model is that many elements that we normally think of separately -- housing, transportation, health care, the physical environment, recreation -- must work together to better meet the needs of older people.

One reason this is so powerful is that the work that goes into creating an age-friendly community ends up benefiting both young and old.
And yet we know that not all communities have benefited from these efforts.

Decades old -- and government supported -- patterns of racial segregation have led to parts of every community having poor educational systems, poor transportation, lack of health care, and few economic opportunities, and these are concentrated in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods.

COVID-19 has brought this home to us in a particularly cruel way: it’s not only that older people are more likely to die of COVID, but that the RATE of death is so much higher for Black and Latinx elders. The death rate for Black seniors is
3.6 times the death rate of whites; for Hispanics, it is 2.5 times.

How is this even remotely acceptable for us in the aging community?
As we work to build communities that serve the needs of all its citizens, we must commit to confronting head on the impact of systemic racism in every aspect of our health and social service system.

These are often uncomfortable discussions, but funders are taking up this challenge, and those who work in the field of aging must join in this fight as well.

We in the aging world CAN’T do this by ourselves, so it is one more reason why we MUST expand our partnerships and our horizons.
As Lesson 4 says, we *are* all in this together. Let’s make sure the slogan really means ALL.
The quest for racial justice and the impact of COVID-19 make this one of the most challenging times in our history, including for funders. The desperate need for resources has outstripped even the most generous organizations in philanthropy, and more will be needed.

BUT there is also hope.

The Governor of California is creating -- the with help of many of GIA’s members and friends -- the most comprehensive plan for the state’s older population in decades. Massachusetts and New York have declared themselves to be ‘age friendly states.’ The Tri-State Learning
Collaborative in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine is an exemplar of multi-state cooperation. And the list goes on.
If I’ve learned anything in 40 years, it is that the people that go into the field of aging are great people.

You could all be making MORE MONEY and have easier work somewhere else but are DEEPLY COMMITTED to these issues.

I know we are OFTEN FRUSTRATED because the need is GREAT and getting GREATER, and sometimes it seems that no one else is paying attention.
If we are going to succeed in this broad arena, we need honest thinking and everyone’s ideas, especially those impacted by our work.

GIA has demonstrated the ability to lead and to be a champion for aging – and this is a role I am proud that we have been able to play. With your support, GIA has created new knowledge and engaged new funders.

By letting people—inside and outside philanthropy—know what is going on, and help people find new partnerships and ideas, we can move forward together.
For a small organization like GIA with ambitious goals and a small staff, we know that the process will sometimes be messy.

But messy isn’t just slow and contentious.

As we can see -- messy can also be FUN. And it has been for me.
So my last lesson is -- don’t despair. We still have work to do!

This work is important, we believe in it, and we have made a difference – and we WILL make a difference.

It has been truly been an honor to work with all of you. I look forward to the day when I greet you all again with a firm handshake or a warm hug, but that will need to wait for safer times.
Thank you for all you do for older people!

For now, I thank you for all you do for older people today, and look forward to all the great things you will do in the future.

I can’t wait to see what GIA and the field of aging have in store for us!