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The Life List

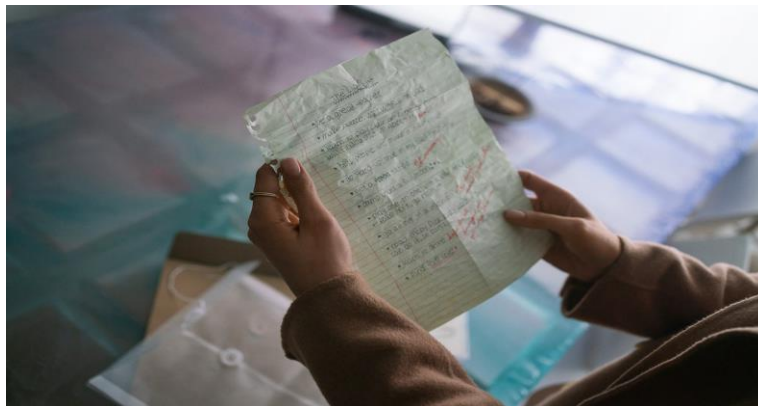
In this paper, I will be examining the benefits of lists in the movie *The Life List* by Adam Brooks released on March 28, 2025. Utilizing the Psychoanalytical theory, I will analyze the benefits of a list and how it could change someone's life in a positive way and help organize their life after the loss of a family member. Psychoanalytical Theory is the approach to literary texts that focuses on character's mental issues (Encyclopedia, Britannica). The Psychoanalytic theory is an important to the movie *The Life List* because it is showing how a person can get better while struggling with mental health, just how Alex dealt with grief and lost herself until she found herself and got her life back on track. I argue that lists can be helpful in some peoples' lives in a good way even after experiencing loss, not pursuing your career yet, trying to find love, and fulfilling your dreams. In the movie Alex is left with a list that she wrote when she was only thirteen years old. When her mother passes away, she is left with DVDs and instructions on how to follow the list to give her a bit of guidance to get out of the hole she has put herself in.

In the movie, *the Life list*, a young girl named Alex is a bit lost in her life and her mom notices it. One day when Alex is complaining to her mother about her life, her mother suddenly tells her that she has cancer and there is no cure, so she doesn't have much time left. Alex bursts into tears, and suddenly she runs out of time, and her mother has now passed. She has two older brothers, making her the youngest and only daughter. Furthermore, when it comes to finding out who gets what the mother shares, Alex finds out she was left with nothing. Before she goes to the lawyer, he tells her that he needs to see her afterwards in private. She then does so; she finds out that her mom left her an envelope. Inside that envelope was a DVD and a piece of paper. The paper was a list that she had written when she was young along with a DVD that was a video of

her mom explaining to her that she knows how frustrated she may be since she got none of the shares. Her mother then explains to her that she must follow through the list and every time she completes something, she gets a new DVD. The mother also expressed that she got none of the shares because the mom noticed how lost she told her, “You have got to get yourself out of this hole, I can’t help you, but I can leave you a shovel” (Brooks). Alex really started to think of this quote that her mom had said, and that's when she decided that her life really was not on track how she thought it was. At first, Alex was denial because she did not think of a list she wrote when she was a child could help her sort out her life, now as an adult. In the article, *The Brain's Affairs with Lists*, it is stated that “each time you complete a task off your list, your brain gets a hit of dopamine” (university admin). Dopamine is when your brain gets a sense of accomplishment. When Alex gave the list a chance, she began to feel a sense of dopamine when she would cross things off the list, so she got motivated because she liked the feeling. As Alex kept making her way through the list, she started to crash into having some difficulties; she began to feel unmotivated or as though she was wasting her time. When Alex finally finishes everything off of the list, the lawyer tells her that the final share that she will be receiving is her mother's house. When Alex finally made her way through the entire list, she comes to the conclusion that her mother was right all along; she did need to look at her life and fix it up.

In the film *The Life List*, when Alex's mom passes away from cancer, she is absolutely destroyed. Alex and her mother were very close and it were her go to person for almost anything, she felt like she was the only one struggling from her mother's death, as if she had been more hurt than anyone else. It felt like she was never going to get over it, in the article *Experiences of loss and grief in adults* it states “Loss and grief have also been used to understand experiences of “letting go” of the past and “moving on” with the present, and how people adjust

to loss and change.” (Conaill et al.) Alex feels so stuck with her mother's passing however, when she starts to discover the list and how it is slowly changing her life as she starts to cross things off little by little, Alex begins to notice that she is changing as a person; in a good way. The grief that Alex is having to deal with is leading her in a direction she did not realize she needed, while her mother was alive she had told Alex that she needed to take a different path in life and she did not listen because she thought her life was perfect the way it was. Before Alex had discovered what this list could do to her life; she highly doubted it because she claims she wrote this list when she was only thirteen. In the DVD her mother explains that she knows that it may sound foolish to follow the list since it was written so long ago, but she reassures her that this is the extra step she needs to take in her life and see it from a different perspective.



This is the list that Alex made when she was thirteen, and which she attempts to complete in this film.

In addition, one of the main things on the list that the mom is consistently reminding Alex of is “be a great teacher” (brooks). Alex used to be a teacher but then quit when her mom was first diagnosed with cancer so that she could help her mom run her beauty company. The mother realized how drained and tired Alex was from that job not because she did not like it but,

because she noticed that it was not Alex's passion. Her mother knew all along that she was meant to be a teacher. It was something she knew she was good at but put it on pause for her mother to get the help she needed so she could take care of her health.

When the mother passed, Alex automatically thought her mom had left her company due to the fact that she was the only daughter. When she found out she had no shares with the company, she acted out in anger and disappointment in her mother because she truly thought it was in her hands but rather, it was passed down to her sister-in-law. Alex then decided to start applying to jobs to become a teacher again, however, she had a difficult time. It was until her lawyer told her about a job that was being offered in a woman shelter for the kids of the mothers in there. She thought it was different but decided to give it a try anyways. When she made her way through the first day, it was terrible. A child acted horribly towards her, and she did not know how to feel because she had never had an angry reaction from a student. Alex took it upon herself and began to study with the child to try to understand him. Once she did, she brought him some books she thought he may like along with a DVD of Hamlet. After class he called for her outside and threw the stuff she gave him in a puddle of water, Alex filled up with confusion because she was only trying to build a connection with him. Despite his actions a few days later he explained to her that he watched the video she gave him and she smiled. In the article Contemporary Education Psychology, it says "teacher motivation affects student motivation" (Ahn et al.). Alex was so motivated to help this student that she then gave them an assignment in the next following days, that included doing something about themselves, and he turned into the most beautiful thing she had seen. It was not only a writing, but it was something he joined along with his artwork, Alex had realized that she finally got through to this student. This was Alex's "I made it moment" or when she realized that she really did make a difference in a student's life. After this she finally

had the joy of being able to scratch this from her list and move forward not only with the list but also with her life. This event proves to the audience that a motivated teacher makes a motivated student, just how Alex was determined to get to know the student; the student was determined to try in school and be a better person.

Later, Alex is reaching towards the end of the list; however, she is struggling with the last one left to be crossed off. "Find true love" (Brooks). She had a boyfriend in the beginning of the film however, when she thought about the four questions her mom said she must be able to answer to know if she really loves him, she realized that he was not the right person for her. He was a video game addict, did reckless activities, and he only saw Alex as someone who would work for his video game company when he made it one day. Once she realized he was not the one for her, she left him and this is when she made her first step onto taking the list.



This was when Alex was trying to build a relationship with her father

even after realizing he was not her biological father.

Alex struggled a lot to find love because she ended up getting so hurt from finding out that her father was not her biological dad. This is what made Alex begin to unravel the truth behind who her mom really was. When this happens Alex completely forgets about the list, this tears and breaks her. She never thought her mom was the type of person to hurt anyone, and to find out that her mom cheated was something she did not expect to come. In the journal *Death and Grief Love Letters*, it is said “grieving the death of someone they love is the pain of grief linked to the power of love” (Rosenblatt). Alex began to fall in love with one of her coworkers at the school but, she ended up leaving him because she felt as though he did not actually see her as a person but rather he saw her as someone who is supposed to follow him and live the life that he wants. He would want everything to be done in the way he said; he only wanted her around his friends, and he did not like the life that she lived. Fast forward some time. Alex begins to catch feelings for her lawyer because she realizes how much she has hurt and gone through, and she realizes that Brad is the only one who has actually stuck around to help her complete the list and become a better version of herself. Even in hard times he never gave up on her and instead of giving up, he would push her to do better.

“The Psychoanalytic Theory is a type of therapy that helps you understand how hidden thoughts and emotions affect how and what you feel” (“Psychoanalysis Is a Long-Term Talk Therapy That Helps Uncover Hidden Thoughts, Emotions and Patterns to Support Emotional Growth and Healing.” *Cleveland Clinic*, 6 Oct. 2025). Alex struggles with her mental health when her mother passes away, and she is dealing with grief. Alex learns how to better herself along with fighting the challenges in her life. In the article, *Five Reasons Why Writing Lists are*

Good for your Mental Health says, “Lists are therapeutic” (Grover). Alex seems to find a sense of being comfortable in the list or even as if she felt close to her mom, this helped her relief the stress more so, when she would watch the DVD, she felt like her mom was with her.

In the beginning of 2025, the movie “The Life List” came out. As soon as this movie came out on Netflix, it went viral. It was all over TikTok, Facebook, and even Instagram, people were saying how after watching this movie they started to see life differently or there were even some that were just talking about how everyone needs to see this movie at least once in their lives because of how good and inspiring it was. As seen in the picture that is given, the person who published this is expressing what she learned and noticed from the movie. She expresses that as a woman we tend to forget our dreams and beliefs because we pour ourselves into others so much that we forget what it is that we may want.



This is one post that was published on Facebook; it was recommended to others. Social media was a big part of this movie, becoming so popular and heartwarming to the audience.

Abstract

The film *The Life List* utilized the Psychoanalytical theory and analyzed the benefits of a list and how it could change someone's life in a positive way and help organize their life after a loss of a family member. In this film Alex is dealing with grief when her mother passes away, and the lawyer, Brad, gave Alex DVDs that her mother had left for her. In these DVDs that she left is the mother talking to Alex and explaining to her that she needs to get her life together. Alex disagrees with her mother and is confused as to why she feels like her life is at a good standing point.

Alex was also given an envelope, and this was a list that she had written when she was about thirteen years old. Her mother explains to her that she wants her to follow it to get her life together. In this film, the Psychoanalytical theory is used when Alex is dealing with grief, and one of the things on the list is to find true love. I found an article that said while someone is dealing with grief, it can be difficult to find love. This ties back to Alex because as the film goes on, the only thing that Alex has trouble crossing off the list is finding true love. I incorporated the Psychoanalytical theory to understand the way Alex is and why she acts how she does. This film is filled with many different emotions, plots, and drama. Alex goes from dealing with grief, to finding herself, to falling back down, and last she was back up and had her life together before she knew it.

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