



the grateful heart

the home of love, faith, hope, and other blessings



on a woman's path

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Most of my life, I am not sure I thought much about what it meant to have a *grateful heart*. I can remember saying the words, “Oh, I’m soooooo grateful...” always with full drama, but with little conscious meaning behind it. I distantly understood the notion of being grateful and thought of it as a virtue of a good person. What I don’t recall feeling was that being grateful was an intentional quality I possessed. My first recollection of really being startled by the idea of being **grateful** or **ungrateful** was several years before my mom passed.

In her final years, my mother was not a happy woman. Now I recognize that she was terribly lonely and afraid. She used to tell me, “There are voids you cannot fill.” At the time, there seemed nothing that could satisfy or comfort her. As much as my brothers and I worked to care for her, she moaned and complained about anything and everything. There was no pleasing her and it was often discouraging to each of us.

During those years, my life also was in transition and seemed much more full of worries, stress and uncertainty than I see looking back on it now. I had survived another untimely divorce. My daughter was painfully finding herself with some hurtful implications on my life — but I was alive and breathing. I had started a new not-yet-successful business with my dearest friend, and together we had scraped up enough money to live at the beach in a house we hoped, after a lot of hard work, we would be able to



somehow afford. These circumstances sound full of promise to me now. Time does heal things in our minds and memory. However, what I do recall is that I was constantly worried, afraid, unsettled, and grumpy about what seemed a steady, unending, uphill struggle with life.

One Saturday morning, I called my mom for our regular weekly chat. My brother had just left her house, apparently in a huff. She had been sharing her latest complaints with him. “Your brother is quite mad at me,” she told me. She recounted every word of their conversation and then summed it up laughing at him sarcastically as she told me of his parting words, “Mom,” he said, “If you were a little more grateful, God would bless you more!”

I think his message fell on deaf ears with my mom, but the words seemed to echo off the walls of my own mind. In a way, the words became an unintended moment of truth for me, a personal awakening of sorts. My spiritually disconnected life passed through my mind as the important message seemed to sink in. So many doors had opened for me. ***Had I not noticed?*** I had been plucked out of an abusive situation and gently guided to a safe place. **How many others get such grace?** I was alive, paying my rent, and starting a whole new life with possibilities awaiting my action. It wasn’t necessarily an easy path, but I had been so lost in the changes and the negative view of my small personal trials that being faithful had been forgotten — being the least bit grateful for the twists of fate that had brought about an emerging renewal and revitalization of my whole existence had been somehow overlooked.

My brother’s words to my mom that one Saturday morning have stayed with me all these years. They often come to me when I hear myself momentarily slipping into some unjustified funk. Today, having a grateful heart has become an important practice. I’m still learning what goes on in a grateful heart, but it is clear that it is a heart that pays attention to life, one that takes in the beauty and gifts of every minute and consciously appreciates them. I have also

The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.

— Helen Keller



found that having a grateful heart is more of a discipline, a choice we make in how we walk in the world and see life. Recently, an analogy used by author Dawna Markova came my way in an article I was reading. She likened the act of gratitude to a flashlight. When turned on in the dark, it allows you to see what has been there all along. It helps you see what escaped you in your own darkness. A grateful heart is full of light.

As we approach another season of thanksgiving, I decided to see if I could learn more about what resides in a grateful heart by asking a few special friends to share their thoughts. I've tried to give you a glimpse about them that shows both what makes them unique and also what we all share that is common — the truth that a grateful heart is the home of love, faith, hope, and other blessings. May their stories and reflections light your grateful heart.

SALLY

painter, sculptor, life-long best friend

A grateful heart for me is peace of the soul. There are no difficulties when I have an “attitude of gratitude” as they say in A.A. I often heard, “You got a problem? You aren't being grateful.”

This life's journey has given me so very much to be grateful for. As I sit here thinking of all its blessings, I feel overwhelmed with fullness of heart — simple blessings such as seeing a beautiful fall sunset, enjoying a successful day painting a painting that made me feel good inside, the blessing of sight itself. And I must mention moments such as experiencing the miracle of childbirth and watching quietly as my babies slept — and now watching my babies' babies as they learn and grow. I know that I am blessed and that I am grateful. It is in the gratitude that I am blessed and so the cycle repeats.

The gratitude is the blessing itself.

traditional Irish blessing

May the
blessing of
light be on
you, light
without, and
light within.

May the
blessed
sunshine
shine on
you and warm
your heart till it
glow like a
great peat fire,
so that the
stranger may
come and be
warmed,
and also a
friend.

A Grateful Heart
edited by
M. J. Ryan

KIN

HR leader in Asia-Pacific and champion of well-being

To me having a grateful heart means that we need to face all the ups and downs in life with courage and use the special moments of our trials for self-reflection. I believe that we are all here for a purpose — one of which is to be that pillar of strength that brings a spark of hope and a ray of joy to someone else, regardless of how small we feel or bleak it may seem to us at the time. I am thankful to all who have come into my life at different stages. They will become the mosaic of a wonderful memory for my journey through this world.

CINDY

business leader and champion for diversity

As I think about what my heart is grateful for, at this time in my life, I think about my relationships — all of them. People and their connection to me are the essence of what sustains me. Some of them are simplistic without much depth and some are complex and difficult. But all of them are important to me. Without the relationships in my life, I would not be the person I am today. The most wondrous thing is that I continue to grow and evolve, thanks to those people who are woven into the fabric of who I am. I'm grateful for all that they give me. They are, without question, my life. Thank you to my family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and those whom I've only met from a distance... thank you for all that you do.

SID

pioneer of new ideas with a warm, inclusive heart

When I think of a grateful heart what comes to mind for me first and foremost is the gratitude I feel every day for the relationship I have with my sons. I consider it the highest compliment that many people do not know that two of my three sons are actually my stepsons. When my late husband and I decided to come together and be a family, we discussed and thought long and hard on how to blend our

As soon as
healing takes
place, go out
and heal
somebody
else.

— Maya Angelou



families together. All three of my sons are out of the house now, but not necessarily “off the payroll.” Nowadays, when I tell friends that my son came home for the weekend, or called to see how I’m doing (without asking for anything), it is most often not my natural son, but one of my stepsons. I love that they see me as their mom. I’m also grateful for the friends I have who understand me, support me, and commiserate with me on the many challenges that come with life “just presenting itself to you.”

DENICE

proud new mother and business leader extraordinaire

I think a grateful heart is a balance between giving and receiving. I feel very fortunate because my life couldn’t be any better right now. I have this amazing new life that has brought us so much happiness, love, and laughter, and he’s healthy and of course very smart! I have a wonderful husband and a terrific family who have been so supportive and loving. I feel good about the important relationships in my life. I try to give as much as I can and have a meaningful impact to people that I care about. In return I get a lot of inspiration and joy from these relationships.

MARY

devoted to customer excellence and there-for-you friend

A grateful heart for me means having had the good fortune to have come from modest beginnings, where my siblings and I were taught the value of family, God, country and freedom. Early on I remember my parents struggling to keep all of us fed, clothed, healthy and happy. When life presents its challenges, I often think back on the bumps in the road for my family and take strength from this value system I was given early on. Today, my life is full in every way and often I think that it could easily be taken from me. For that reason, I wake up each day and make a point of being grateful for all of the goodness in my life — my family, my friends, and a lifestyle that remains modest — this allows me to stay focused on the important things in life.

Each day offers us the gift of being a special occasion if we can simply learn that as well as giving, it is blessed to receive with grace and a grateful heart.

— Sarah Ban Breathnach
Simple Abundance



DEBBY (yes, another one spelled with a Y)
global change leader and happy new wife

My thoughts on a grateful heart are captured in a poem I wrote some years back called *Gratitude*:

If I were painting a picture of gratitude, I would fill the canvas with green, an expression of vitality and harmony, the foundation that allows beautiful experiences, people, insights, and challenges into my world.

Then I would add, sweeping strokes of blue-ish white, erupting across the landscape. The lesson in these bold dashes of color is more about acknowledging what comes into life and less about why or how it chose you.

Scattered across the panorama of blues and greens, I see pulsating globes of sparkling gold. They represent the sustaining and renewing energy that comes from acknowledging life's gifts and experiences with a heart that is grateful.

Look for the gold in people and places — draw it out into the light; cherish it and polish it — and its glow will shine back on you!

Nothing is
more
honorable
than a
grateful
heart.

— Seneca



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