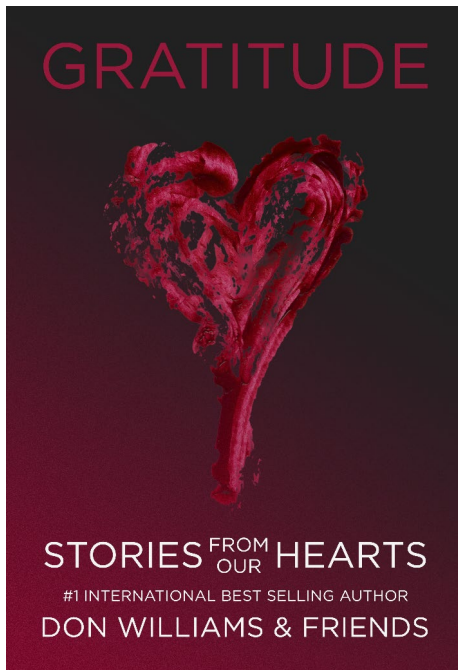


GRATITUDE
STORIES FROM OUR HEARTS
BY
DON WILLIAMS AND FRIENDS



"The Gratitude Heart"

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What Others are Saying...

"Don Williams is living proof that actively practicing gratitude can change your life.

Don has done an exceptional job of illustrating that the key to gratitude is disciplined practice and eloquently presents numerous stories that reinforce this message.

Gratitude shifts you into a higher state and is the secret ingredient to living a more powerful life.

Buy two copies of this book and give one to a friend."

Gina Mollicone-Long

International Best-Selling Author, Creator of Greatness
U and the ACME Coaching Framework

Dedication

To everyone who has shared a story of the inexplicable beauty and power of Gratitude with another person – thank you for making the world a better place.

This book is for you.

“Maybe Stories are Just Data
with Soul”.

Dr. Brene' Brown

Table of Contents

My name is Don Williams and I'm Grateful	11
How to Use this Book	15
How to use this book as a Gratitude Journal	16
How this Book Came to Be	17
Do You Have a Gratitude Story to Share?	18
Let's End Childhood Cancer	19
I Choose to See Good	23
I'm Living Proof.....	31
I'm Grateful for Reconciliation	39
A Selfless Stranger.....	49
The Miracle	57
Ripples to Waves	65
Integrity Wins Every Time	73
High Atop the Rockies: I Found Myself Deep in the Search for Gratitude	81
I Believe in People	99
Turkey Day.....	107
The Company was Only a Bonus	115
I Have Been Gifted a Second Life	123
Gratitude Has Made Me Better	131
A Mother's Pride.....	141

A Lifetime in 13 Year	151
The Gratitude Jar	159
The Thank You Game.....	165
I Listened.....	173
A Christmas Miracle	181
I'm Going to Build a Library.....	189
14 hours to Forever	197
A 57 Year Love Story.....	205
The House of Thank You	215
Tell Me About Everyone You Have Ever Loved...and Why You Aren't With Them Now	221
The Gift of Trust.....	230
Conclusion	237
About the Author	239

My name is Don Williams and I'm Grateful

My gratitude journey started at the Entrepreneur's Organization Global Leadership Conference in Bangkok, Thailand. A smart lady and now friend by the name of Gina Mollicone-Long was speaking during a break-out session. Gina is a Process Control Engineer by education and a trainer of Performance Coaches professionally. I was lucky to be in the audience when she talked about the role of energy and emotion in human performance. During her lecture, she proposed that humans perform at their highest level when they express or experience gratitude, and at their lowest level when they express or experience fear or shame. Little did I know that thought would completely change my life.

When we returned to the United States, I drove myself to our local Home Depot and bought a

small, galvanized pail. It wasn't heavy but it's noticeable, it's shiny, not easy to carry in your pocket and you can't really hide it, the pail is about eight inches tall and eight inches across. I wrote the word "gratitude" on a piece of paper and dropped it the pail. I carried the pail everywhere with me. That pail became a physical reminder to me to be intentional about my gratitude practice. It sat in the passenger seat of my car, in my truck, on the desk in my home office, on the credenza in my actual office, and beside the TV when Sunday movies came on. I did this for six months. The pail was my physical reminder to practice gratitude The interesting thing about gratitude, is the more you practice gratitude the more grateful you become. After six months or so I made the decision, I was going to share my newfound gratitude with my Company Leadership Team. We started a weekly Gratitude Exercise called One Good Thing. Every Monday at nine in the morning, each member was given one minute or two to share One Good

Thing. One Good Thing is a share of whatever a person is most Grateful from their business, family, or personal life from the previous week. It was awkward at first and took a while before people were comfortable enough to really share, but once they did, their stories were eye opening.

Two stories stand out for me. One of my teammates was a parent to a daughter who loved soccer. When it was his turn to speak, he said that he was grateful that his daughter finally introduced him to her friends. You see, my teammate had been attending his daughter's soccer games week in and week out, but his daughter rnever acknowledged that he was there. Until one day, she did. That tiny moment made my teammates' week.

Another teammate was a new grandmother. We all knew that her daughter was pregnant, and that they were all excited for the baby. What we

didn't know was that the baby had been diagnosed with a congenital defect that increased his risk for not surviving to term. If he did survive to term, the doctor said that it would be likely that he would be stillborn. If he wasn't stillborn, he would most likely die immediately after birth. When it was her turn to speak, she said that she was grateful that her grandson was born. Though he lived only an hour, she was grateful to meet her grandson, hold him and tell him she loved him. I thought I was going to teach my teammates about the power of Gratitude, and I learned so much more than I taught.

How to Use this Book

These stories showed me that the spectrum of gratitude has unfathomable breadth and depth.

This book is a compilation of such stories from family, friends, and strangers.

My wish is that as you go through these pages, they light a fire in your own heart to begin a daily intentional practice of gratitude.

At the end of each story, there are a few blank pages. I encourage you to reflect on the moments of your daily life that resemble each of these accounts. Journal daily until gratitude becomes a habit.

If you read one story a day, then this book has twenty-five days of stories.

How to use this book as a Gratitude Journal

I'm Grateful for:

For my Faith, my parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and all ancestors whom I never met. Leta my sons, their spouses, and children. I'm grateful for my sister and her family and my brother and his family. I'm grateful to have been born in the US, for my dogs, to be an entrepreneur, for my team, my customers and vendors who help us make a difference in our client's lives.

I'm Grateful for:

This sunrise, hot coffee, and a couple of moments of solitude.

I'm Grateful for:

Yesterdays' meeting, a relaxing weekend, and a busy week next week.

How this Book Came to Be

I've tried not to oversteer Gratitude: Stories from Our Hearts. I intentionally let the beauty and purity of randomness help craft the book

Some of my co-authors are close friends who took forever (LOL) to deliver their stories, and some co-authors I met on social media and within a day they had submitted a story. Some co-authors suggested a friend or spouse who had a story to share as well. My friend Warren Rustand submitted two stories

I'm grateful to all my friends. Remember there's real power in saying yes. All progress starts with a yes somewhere.

Do You Have a Gratitude Story to Share?

By the time this book is published, I'll have already started the second Gratitude Stories book.

Do you have a Gratitude story to share?

Would you like to join me as an ambassador of the power of gratitude?

If you have a Gratitude Story to share with the World, please visit:

<https://donwilliamsglobal.com/gratitude-project/> and learn how you can join me.

Let's End Childhood Cancer

This book is a passion project. I neither paid nor charged any of my friends anything to join me in this book.

The profits of this sale of this book will go to St.

Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. They have been fighting pediatric cancers and other catastrophic diseases since 1962. Through their work, the survival rate for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common type of childhood cancer, has increased from 4 percent in 1962 to 94 percent today*, which proves that even cancer can be beaten if we commit to put in the work.

Please take a stand against childhood cancer and donate directly to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital at

<https://www.stjude.org/donate/donate-to-st-jude>

*Wikipedia 2021

Welcome to your gratitude journey. I hope you enjoy the ride.

Don Williams

“Enough is a feast”.

Buddhist proverb

I Choose to See Good

I was homeless for a while as a teen, so I learned early on to watch my own back. Out there, everyone took just as much as they could get.

There wasn't much room for gratitude.

I always thought of myself as being a little lucky though. Despite how hard those years were, it felt like the world was watching over me the whole time. I was very aware of how things fell into place. Sometimes I would meet the exact right person at the exact right time when I needed help. It happened often enough that I began to think of it as fate instead of coincidence

As I grew older, I nurtured a profound sense of thankfulness for these moments. I started to look for them. Until one day, I decided that I

would take matters into my own hands. I set two alarms on my phone, one at 10 in the morning and the other at 2 in the afternoon. I've had these alarms through weekdays, weekends, and holidays for as long as I can remember. When I first started this habit, the alarms came with reminders like "I am successful", "I am doing well", and "I am okay". They pushed me to always look at the bright side.

When my mom died a couple of years later, it felt like a light inside of me had gone dark. My father grieved her for years. There were days when I felt like I lost him too. Our house had grown so quiet that I got myself a puppy

One day, I saw him standing by the backdoor while the screen was open. He was solid and unmoving, three feet in the house and one foot on the porch, with his nose upturned towards the garden. I quickly realized that he was listening to the wind. How amazing was this to

me, to find my dog in awe of nature. He reminded me to appreciate the moment all over again.

My alarms no longer ring these days, but the great thing is that every time I look at the clock and see that it is 10AM or 2PM, I remember to give myself a little room to breathe. I meditate twice a day I list down the things I'm grateful for. I click my heels when I'm happy! It's been a long road from being that angry girl on the street, but I've since learned that some things are a matter of perspective. We choose how we see things, and I choose to see good.

Gratefully,

Anita Toth

"As we express our gratitude. we
must never forget that the highest
appreciation is not to utter words
but to live by them."

John F. Kennedy

I'm Living Proof

I was putting in 16-hour days at the height of my law practice in 2009. On a random August morning, I woke up at 5AM to prepare for two depositions. At this time, I was waking up before dawn so often that it felt natural to me.

However, when I got out of bed that day, I knew something was different. I quickly realized that I couldn't feel the entire left side of my head. It was like my skull was filled with marshmallows. The numbness stretched out to include my left arm, making it feel like a weight down my side. It took a split second for me to decide to wait it out. When it didn't, I decided to go ahead with my day anyways. I turned on the lights and started poring over my notes.

About two hours later, my wife Robin poked her head into my room. I told her how I was feeling, and she told me I was crazy and that I needed to

go to the emergency room. I weighed it quickly, still under the belief that it couldn't be that bad. I called the lawyers from both depositions, and they agreed to move the meetings to a later date. Finally, at 8AM, I drove myself to the hospital.

The time in the emergency room was a blur. I remember lying in the CT scan machine one moment, and then being told that I needed to undergo an angiogram the next day. Robin, our son Will, and I ate sandwiches while waiting for the results.

The doctor was frantic when he found me. Apparently, they discovered a large bleed in the middle of my brain, right where all the veins came together to receive and send out blood. Because it was such in a difficult place, the doctor said that surgery was impossible. The best they could do was wait and hope

Hearing this news was easier than I thought it would be. All my things were in order; the papers for our house were set; I had Robin and Will right here beside me; and, as far as going went, it was a good way to go. They observed me for a couple of days until the bleed reabsorbed itself, and then I was sent home, and, for a while, everything was perfect.

It wasn't until a couple of months later when I experienced my second stroke. This time, I knew that it was worse because I couldn't feel my left leg and arm. I was 43.

Coming back from the doctor's office this time was different. The fingers of my left hand had curled themselves into a loose fist. I dragged my left leg when I walked. It bothered me that my problems were on display for the world to see.

I decided to take matters into my own hands. For the next six weeks and on top of regular visits to the doctor, I started meditating and

exercising. Every day, I would imagine bending my knee, lifting my left leg, and putting it in front of my right. I walked thousands of steps a day in those days, and I never missed a day. It was the miracle of all miracles when I started walking properly again.

It has been seven years since that fateful August. My neurosurgeon just cleared me for visits once every two years. I have never felt healthier and happier. These days, I spend less time at work and more time with my family. I cherish them deeply because they showed me how strong I am. On the days when walking was hard, they walked beside me. And on the days when I thought that everything was bleak, they reminded that we had each other

My favorite Bible passage always said that troubles bring character, and character brings hope. I have hope and I am living proof.

Gratefully,

Edward Cox

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Albert Einstein

I'm Grateful for Reconciliation

For the longest time, I associated my father with Wednesday afternoons. Back then, it was company policy that staff could get at least one half-day off, and my dad always picked Wednesdays. So it happened that I got an entire summer of him taking me to the pool. We would spend the entire day in the water, getting redder and redder under the Mississippi sun. When we weren't swimming, we were playing tennis in our flip flops; my dad, gloriously shirtless in the way only dads can be. It was the best summer of my life

When I turned 7, my dad left for rehab. He would do several stints in rehab over the next ten years.

We took a family trip to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. I must have been 16 or 17 at this time. The

vacation started like most others. We fell back into talking pretty easily and, strangely, I still look back on those conversations as the ones that have made me who I am the most today. Over the span of a few days, he made up for all the missing time. He taught me how to be a good entrepreneur; how to sell from a place of authenticity; how to genuinely care for the people that would one day work for me; and how to lead through action. Until we caught him drinking again; and that was the beginning of the end.

I left for college the following summer. Looking back, a lot of it was fear more than anger. He was never a mean drunk. He never hit me or my mom. But I remember feeling distinctly scared about what all the alcohol could do my dad. I couldn't understand why he could risk it

Over the next twenty years, he was in and out of rehab, two- and three-year stints, but it would

always end up the same. I got married and moved as far away as I could, all the way down to Dallas, Texas. I refused every single Christmas dinner. There were no family birthdays nor reunions if my father was going to be in the same room.

I was well into my 40's when I woke up one day thinking about my kids. We had a tradition back in Philadelphia, where every summer everybody gathers in this little patch of land just to talk and celebrate. My whole childhood was colored with memories of those weeks. I wanted my kids to experience that too, but I wasn't sure if I felt safe bringing them so close to my dad and so close to what we used to share. I decided that day that I needed to talk to him to get closure, if only for my children.

I turned it over in my head for days. It was, at best, an 8-hour drive, if I drove straight. I planned my travel and route. I'd have breakfast

at this place. I'd stop for a quick nap there. I did not tell a soul. If I was going to see my father for the first time again in 20 years, I wanted to see him honest. I didn't want to call in advance so they could hide the bottles I'm sure he still had.

The night before I had set out to leave, I told my wife my plans, and she understood immediately. I drove out at 7:00AM the following morning and was pulling into the driveway of my childhood home by sunset.

There is no more surreal moment than that one. Our house was built so the living room looked straight out onto the street through huge windows. As I pulled in in my truck, I could see my dad seeing me, his face in absolute shock.

I walked into the room I spent years growing up in. My dad was in his favorite chair, both Dad and the chair a little worse for the wear. It suddenly struck me how old he was, how much time had passed since we were last in the same

place. He looked at me with confusion and fear but also, I think, with a little hope and this happy kind of sadness that only a bittersweet reunion could bring. For all the planning I did, I never made it as far as figuring out what to say to him. So, at a loss for words, I bent over his chair and hugged him for the first time in what was forever.

He started crying on my shoulder, but when I pulled back to look at his face, he was wearing the biggest smile. He was so happy to see me. He said it felt like his prodigal son had finally come back home. I spent the rest of the evening on the couch across from him, struck by the enormity of where we were. He was sick by then, dying from lung cancer and coughing more than he could talk, but it felt like a weight was lifted from me. I didn't have to worry about what the alcohol could do to his body anymore. This was my father, in all his perfections, and we had still had this day this time.

I brought my children over for Christmas that year and all the Christmases after that. There were birthdays, Thanksgivings, and weekends just because. My children met my father and loved him with none of my prejudices. It was the greatest gift I could probably ever have given him.

During the last week of my father's life, I stayed by his bedside. By this time, there wasn't a lot of talking, but there was a lot of peace. This was my father. He taught me to change the things I can and to accept the things I cannot. I will never forget how amazing it felt, feeling gratitude towards him during those last few moments. I owe him everything. I am glad to have called him Dad.

Gratefully,

Ab DeWeese

"The way to develop the best that is
in a person is by appreciation and
encouragement."

Charles Schwab

A Selfless Stranger

High school changed my life, but not in the way most people would think. When people are asked about their favorite day in high school, nine times out of ten, the answer would be prom or graduation. Mine was Career Day.

It was an exceptionally ordinary day too. I remember filing into our tiny library, elbow-to-elbow with the rest of the graduating class. It was professional after professional: a doctor; a politician; a company manager; a never-ending list of jobs. I was only just listening with half an ear - my eyes, scrolling through my phone for anything more interesting - when a woman walked up and introduced herself as an engineer. To this day, I don't know if it was her demeanor that intrigued me; or the fact that I was hearing the word 'engineering' for the first time; or the more important fact that I was

hearing it from the mouth of a woman, but I was convinced that I wanted to grow up and be exactly like her. Here was a woman who was telling me that I could change the world with science and mathematics. Here was a woman who was telling me that I could use numbers and operations to make things move. I told my parents that very night that I was going into Engineering.

I attended college as an Engineering major in the University of Waterloo. Our program was great because we had work terms every four months, where we applied for internship positions to learn real-life skills. It was during one of those terms that I found myself all the way in Singapore. Canada was all I had known for the longest time. My family moved here from China when I was six and we've stayed since. I applied for the internship position with the Singaporean firm on a whim, not even knowing where Singapore was on the map. I lived and

worked out of Singapore for the next four months.

By some twist of fate, I got my first job from a colleague I met during that four-month stint. I moved to Singapore permanently the following year. I met my future husband on my fifth year working as an expatriate.

I always look back on the odds of it happening - how this Chinese girl who grew up in Canada flew to Singapore to meet an American man from Kentucky. I constantly think about how every piece had to fall into place to bring us both there at the right time. I know, at least for me, the first piece was Career Day. The funny thing is, I wasn't even in Engineering when I met my husband, but it was those woman's words that got me there.

I will never be able to thank her. I don't know her name and barely remember her face, but she

taught me that every action has a reaction. There may be days when we feel tiny, when the things we labor over feel small and inconsequential, but that day could change someone's life all the same. So every day, I am grateful she decided to come to my school that day to share a part of her life with us. And every day, I try to be honest and sincere to pay it forward with my own.

Gratefully,

Fanny Dunagan

"When I started counting my
blessings, my whole life turned
around."

Willie Nelson

The Miracle

I've attended several backyard parties in my life, but none will ever come close to the one back in Easter of 2018.

It was the height of summer then, and my uncle Mike loved summer. When my wife and I arrived with our two children in tow, there were maybe 50 people already enjoying the sun. Kids ran in and out of the pool, leaving wet footprints on the cement. My son tugged at my hand and headed straight for the hot tub.

Sometime later, I was bouncing my infant daughter, Cecilia, in my arms when I heard a scream. When I turned around, I caught my cousin's husband, Blake, mid-leap into the hot tub. His son was stuck at the bottom, pushed down by all the feet that, at that time, were panicking along with Blake. The next moment,

Blake was hunched over the boy on the ground, and the boy was purple.

Time felt both faster and slower at that moment. Blake was a dentist, so he knew CPR, but he was also a father, so his emotions were getting in the way. I rushed into the house to look for my wife, who is a registered nurse. She gently pushed Blake away and took over. Three and a half minutes later, the little boy gasped for air. It was only then that I realized that everyone else was on their knees, hands clasped in prayer. I was the only one still standing, with my baby, Cecilia, still sitting on my hip.

I grew up in a devoutly Christian family but was never religious myself. As the paramedics wheeled baby Everett to the hospital, I made a deal with God that if He saved his life, I would be a changed man.

Everett spent seven days in intensive care. His doctors said that he had a 1 in 1,000 chance of coming out without permanent brain damage. He was home and playing with his dinosaurs one week later.

Most people would blame the party and the hot tub for the accident. Most people were not my uncle Mike. Six months later, he invited everybody back into his garden for a homecoming to Christ. I was re-baptized in the very same water where someone else almost lost his life. These days, I hold my family very close to me. Every day feels like the biggest blessing.

Gratefully,

Erik Frank

“Be thankful for what you have;
you'll end up having more. If you
concentrate on what you don't
have, you will never, ever have
enough”.

Oprah Winfrey

Ripples to Waves

We moved to London in the summer of 2016. Our new apartment was still littered with boxes and half-unpacked luggage when my wife discovered a lump in her breast. We found ourselves in the doctor's office that very same week. My wife was 32—young, healthy, and with no family history of the disease—when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

It goes without saying that our move to London was a momentous occasion. It required months of discernment and an endless list of paperwork. We pushed through because we realized that it was a tremendous opportunity that we couldn't possibly say no to. Sitting in the doctor's office that day felt like someone had pulled the rug out from under our new home. I could easily say that that was the worst day of my life, but that would also be discounting my wife's strength.

Shortly after her diagnosis, my wife underwent a mastectomy. She received 6 sessions of chemotherapy and more rounds of radiation than I can count. Her hair fell out in fistfuls. Twice, she had to be rushed to intensive care. My wife remained so graceful all throughout.

To a lot of people, cancer feels like a destructive force. It is long nights and little sleep; food that tastes like paper; and cold soup when no other meal will do. For us, it was Friday nights in chemotherapy, and weekends spent gathering energy for the week ahead. Tiny things became great things. We celebrated every time she was strong enough to sit unaided. We celebrated when chocolate cake tasted like chocolate cake.

For Sue, cancer became her strength. She kept a journal the whole time she was sick. Every morning, she would make a list of everything she was grateful for. Every night, she would read through what she wrote, It inspired her enough

to write a book—a book that will be published this year. Sue also went on social media, where she educated others about her journey with cancer. I sit by her proudly, as she types on her phone. It has been such a pleasure seeing her get stronger despite and because of her diagnosis.

For me, cancer became a wake-up call. For most of my adult life, I was only concerned with making a living. I wanted to make a name for myself and be remembered. Sue's diagnosis taught me that there is more to life than that. These days, I try to pursue a life where I can effect positive change. Every ripple starts with a single good deed, and I intend to create a wave.

Gratefully,

Raj Goodman Anand

"Piglet noticed that even though he had very small heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude."

A.A. Milne

Integrity Wins Every Time

I have a very long list of reasons to be thankful for where I find myself today. I can start with parents, spouse, siblings, teachers, mentors and friends, who have guided me and pointed me in the right direction over the ups and downs of my life. And somehow, from this list, I'm choosing an activity that may surprise a few people, the sport of fencing.

I first picked up a foil at the age of 17 while attending boarding school in England and have been a competitive fencer ever since, for the past 45 years. This relatively unknown sport has provided me with so many key moments.

Moments when I had to dig deep and believe in myself, to just score that next touch. Moments when I was so angry and frustrated with myself that I could barely stay in the gym long enough to gather my belongings and leave unlike the

“good sportsman” that I always believed myself to be.

Over the years, fencing has taught me many a humbling lesson; from being the top seed and envisioning coming home with the gold medal, to actually arriving home with nothing but a bag full of smelly fencing gear, a sore body and a bruised ego. Yet somehow, each time, I found myself going back to the club, donning that same gear (properly washed and sanitized) taking one more fencing lesson, and starting once again with the basics of footwork.

This deep gratitude is for the coaches I’ve had the honor to work with and gain knowledge from I learned how to push past my own limiting beliefs, to come from behind, to win against the odds. To salute, shake hands and congratulate my opponent when I lose. It’s deep gratitude for my fellow fencers, who while on the strip, are sneaky and dangerous opponents and when off

the strip become authentic and trusted friends
It's deep gratitude for the fencing community
that has always welcomed me when I was the
new kid in town, having moved from another
city, not knowing anyone A community that
comes together during tough times to raise
funds for a fencer who has cancer, or create a
memorial tournament for a young fencer who
left us too early in their life, or to celebrate a
beloved coach who gave everything to develop
their students, decade after decade, until their
body couldn't handle it anymore.

In closing, this gratitude is for a sport that
makes me wear a mask when I fence and be
myself without a mask in all other aspects of my
life.

Gratefully,

Jamie Douraghy

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing.
It makes what is excellent in others
belong to us as well.”

Voltaire

High Atop the Rockies: I Found Myself Deep in the Search for Gratitude

Gratitude. How often do we think about it? How often do we practice it? How often should we? Gratitude wasn't top of mind for me as a child or young adult. Now, gratitude is always on my mind. On a daily basis I go through my list of "things" that I am grateful for in my life as a mom, wife, daughter, teacher and more. And what I have come to realize is that it's not about "things," it's about ATTITUDE. So that is what I am most grateful for -- my attitude toward life! I am grateful that I have developed an Attitude of Gratitude. I didn't always have this attitude, but when I needed it most, I dug deep to find it. This is how my gratitude attitude became core in maintaining my health in daily life.

On February 20, 2019, I was in my happy place -- the mountains, skiing with my family! This was

the vacation that I looked forward to all year long. Nature, family, friends, skiing -- it's my JAM! After a full day on the beautiful slopes, I began to experience a pain in my stomach. It was not terrible, so I went on with our usual evening post-ski activities until later when the pain was disrupting my sleep. I took myself to the ER. I had to go alone. My husband stayed in the hotel room with our kids.

At the hospital I had a CT scan and an ultrasound that revealed an ovarian cyst, which was causing my ovary to twist. This was the root of the pain. The ovary was not twisted enough to require surgery -- at the time -- and the cyst was not dangerous either. I was offered and refused pain meds because I was scared and alone, and I didn't want anything to alter my decision making. I was released from the ER and told to follow up with my doctor as soon as I returned home. I rested in my hotel room, and when I felt better the next day, I joined my family for a few

hours of skiing on what was the last day of our vacation. It was an awesome day, and I was so happy to be back on the slopes.

That night, the pain returned with a vengeance. And I was back in the ER! This time the doctors would not let me leave without the consultation of the on-call gynecologist. From there it was a whirlwind. Another ultrasound, and I was admitted to the hospital. My ovary was dangerously twisted. My husband woke our dear friends in the middle of the night and asked one of them to sleep in our room so that they would be there when our children woke up in the morning.

When my husband arrived, we met with the gynecologist who asked me a slew of questions about my history and explained to me that my case was fairly straight forward. He told me that all the images looked normal, but I would have to have my ovary removed as the twisting was

more severe since the previous evening, and it was threatening my health. The doctor was warm, kind, confident, and we agreed to proceed with the surgery. In addition to removing the twisted ovary and fallopian tube, he offered to remove my other fallopian tube as a form of birth control.

Overwhelmed with fear, I immediately agreed to the surgery. At that moment, it didn't seem I had a choice. I needed to be alive for my family! We had no plans to have more children. I didn't realize at the time how important this decision would be -- this relatively spontaneous decision was pinnacle to how my future would be told. The surgery was textbook, perfect, no complications or issues. The doctor told us to go home as soon as I felt well enough to fly and to have a wonderful life. Two days later, that is exactly what we did.

When my phone rang five days later on February 27, 2019, I was happily at home recovering. I never would have imagined hearing the words spoken on that phone call from the doctor who had saved my life just a few days ago: "Janet, I am sorry to have to tell you this but the pathology from your surgery showed Cancer on your ovary." I will never forget this sentence and the way it changed my life forever.

I screamed and I cried, and I just kept saying the word Cancer repeatedly. Telling myself in my head that this prognosis could not be real. I begged the doctor to confirm -- I was so healthy and so young, it must have been a mistake! Funny thing is that he also thought it might be a mistake, and he had requested a second pathology before calling me. It was not a mistake. It was real. It would be confirmed again and again as my ovary traveled across the country for second opinions and follow-up genetic testing.

I called my husband and my sister, in that order. The screaming and crying continued. Next, I received a call from my gynecologist of 13 years who had been with me through the challenges of pregnancy loss and the miraculous birth of my beautiful children. She was calm, compassionate, and collected. She walked me through my next steps and told me that she would see me in her office at 8 a.m. the next morning. Before we hung up, she asked for a favor.

She asked me not to get online and start researching my diagnosis. She told me that everything I would find would be scary, and that the information was not about me and that I needed to get my information from medical professionals. I was so grateful for this advice. To this day I have never Google searched my diagnosis thanks to her advice and the fact that I did not want to be inundated with cancer-related news and stories as a result of my search

history. The next days and weeks turned into a rat race of calling doctors, scheduling/attending appointments, consents to release medical information, and reaching out to family and friends with connections to the best specialists. In the end, the recommendation was the same. I would have to receive six rounds of chemotherapy with a drug cocktail that would cause me to lose my hair. I would also need an additional surgery, a full hysterectomy. When I finally had my medical team in place (with both eastern and western medicine practitioners), I was offered the most incredible piece of advice by my oncology team. They said: "Janet, you need to follow the treatment plan, and you need to live your life. You will be ok and in five months this will all be behind you. But today, and every single day, you need to live your life." At that moment something clicked. I decided right then and there that cancer would never define me. I had to live my life in the present. I

had been so obsessed with the why and the how. In that moment I realized that it didn't matter. What really mattered was my attitude going forward. My ability to find gratitude. My ability to look at the entire situation with the "Attitude of Gratitude."

Like many of us, I always associated cancer with sickness, but I was not sick. I was determined to never feel or look sick. I did not want my young children to worry or be fearful of losing their mom. This was the real challenge: How was I going to live my life, get cancer treatment and protect my children? And how would I do all of that while my hair fell out -- my long, reddishblond hair that most definitely plays a role in my physical identity.

When one of my oncologists shared with me that there was a method called "cold caps" that would prevent hair loss, I was intrigued. This is a scalp cooling system that works by narrowing

the blood vessels beneath the skin of the scalp, reducing the amount of chemotherapy medicine that reaches the hair follicles. With less chemotherapy medicine in the follicles, the hair may be less likely to fall out (<http://www.breastcancer.org>). I decided to use the cold caps. With the use of the caps, my chemotherapy sessions became long, 10-hour days. Aside from the side effects of the chemotherapy, there were many restrictions and guidelines to follow to ensure greater success of limited hair loss with the caps. It seemed daunting until I realized that it was only 6 days. Six days would be so insignificant compared to 41 amazing years that I had already lived I pushed through my treatment and surgery going about my daily activities. I may have moved at a slower pace, but I was still determined to live my life. I continued to work when I was not in treatment and feeling strong. I carpooled my kids to their various activities whenever it was possible. I attended social functions with our

friends and family -- all of these things helped me keep a sense of normal, and they helped strengthen my Attitude of Gratitude.

My husband and I learned how to meditate together. This beautiful practice helped me endure the cold caps and chemotherapy. I found the health and healing benefits of traditional Chinese medicine with the most insightful and holistic Eastern medicine practitioner. Every day I felt the love and support of my family and friends who constantly checked in, stopped by for visits, sent thoughtful gifts -- the list goes on and on. I was living my life!

I did have to put some of the things I enjoyed on hold. I found joy in walks in place of my usual strenuous workouts. Most importantly, I knew this was all temporary, a small hiccup in my journey. Yes, there were days when I could not get out of bed due to the physical side effects of chemotherapy but looking back, I can count all

those days on one hand. I realize now what a huge blessing that is -- a handful (or less) of really bad days in exchange for the rest of my life.

In the blink of an eye, it was August 1, 2019. My last day of chemotherapy. It was over. The day was filled with emotion and positive energy. I had found something in myself during those five months that I never knew I had. Looking back now, it was probably always there. I was blessed to let it lie dormant, and when I needed it, I just had to muster the courage to use it. It has been nine months since my last chemotherapy. Some days it feels like a lifetime ago, and I question that it actually happened. There are also the days when it feels so raw that I find myself gasping for air. Cancer changed the person that I am and the person that I will be in the future. I have learned to focus on my family and my health with a renewed passion. I have returned to my challenging exercise routine with even

more drive and determination. I have made several significant positive changes to my previous healthy eating regimen. I have become a mentor to a woman going through the same diagnosis and treatment that I went through. I am so grateful that she came into my life, and I find that our conversations help me just as much as I know they are helping her. I have joined a woman's cancer group that has become a safe and positive support system. Doing all these cancer-related things post-cancer sometimes even surprises me. I went through this focusing on not being sick, looking at the prognosis as an event, something to be treated and put behind me.

My husband and I even made the conscious choice not to use the word 'cancer' with our children because we know, too well, the stigma that carries. And the fear. They knew I was having treatments regularly; they knew I didn't feel well on some days, and on others we'd walk

and talk and laugh and play. For us, cancer was a heavy word while it was happening. Now, I fight with others facing cancer, and I own it, to some extent. I am a private person, and while my beautiful reddish-blond hair is a badge of who I am, I don't need cancer carrying that same weight. I kept this experience very close within my family and my inner circle

With it behind me, I use the experience in different ways than I would have imagined. I am more forgiving in my friendships and interactions. I realize and acknowledge that everyone has a story. They may not always be wearing that story on their sleeve, so I choose my words and reactions with care and deep consideration.

What did cancer teach me? The lessons are numerous but there is one that stands out based purely on simplicity. When people hear the word cancer, they associate it with a death sentence. I

felt the same -- until one day I didn't. That day has made all the difference. I am not a cancer survivor. The word survivor means a person who copes well with difficult situations, or a person who survives in a situation where others have died. I am not just surviving. I am living and thriving. That is my intent, that is my future. We can't choose what happens to us, but we can choose our reactions. My reaction is gratitude every single day.

Gratefully,

Janet Gendelman

“Learn to be thankful for what you already have, while you pursue all that you want.”

Jim Rohn

I Believe in People

For as long as I can remember, I've called my mother twice a week. On Tuesdays and Fridays, no matter how long my day has been and no matter how long my night has yet to be, I call my mother on the way home from work. She keeps me company the entire drive.

On one of those calls, we got around to talking about my brother and how he's been working on his start-up for a little over five years. It wasn't an easy thing either. He built it from scratch and went through all the crazy parts looking for good partners and getting the right papers to go through. But what he really wanted the start-up to do was to raise money so that he could donate it somewhere else. My mother was in the middle of saying how proud she was of him when I cut her off mid-sentence because I just couldn't wrap my head around the thought. If

people wanted to donate money, wouldn't they just donate it directly? Why go through someone they didn't know? Why was my brother spending so much time on an idea that people had no real need for?

The funny thing about my mother is that she just let me keep talking. I've always been opinionated, and I think she knew that about me. I was breathless and turning into my driveway when she cleared her throat and said, quite matter-of-factly, that she did donate money; that she would do it again tomorrow; and that she would do it even for me.

I remember just feeling dumbfounded when I put the phone down and realized that she was right. I had grown up in a household that encouraged me to be critical about important issues. My mother always made sure that we could speak up and feel heard but as I grew older, that practice started to change. Instead of

being critical, I just chose to criticize. When my mother said she donated without a second thought, I realized that the only thing standing between support and criticism is a choice. We can as easily choose to show up and be supportive as choose to critique and criticize.

Years later, I still hold onto that conversation as the one that changed my life. It doesn't matter if you don't support an idea 100%. You can choose instead to believe in the person behind it. To this day, my brother is the kindest, most selfless man I know. I chose to support him that night. I have continued to choose to support him, as well as a continuous line of other people I love and hold dearly. The best part is that I think I came out winning the most. I feel lighter, more thankful, and more connected to my friends and family and the world around me.

Day by day I choose to show up and focus on the positive and my life has grown inexplicably better as a result.

Gratefully,

JP Midgley

"This a wonderful day. I've never
seen this one before."

Maya Angelou

Turkey Day

My dad has always loved the outdoors. My earliest childhood memories always involved both of us playing in the sun but the tradition of my favorite day started when I was seven years old. That year, my dad took me turkey hunting on opening day of Spring Turkey season. Thirty-three years later, the opening day is still our day.

Looking back, I didn't love those days particularly because I enjoyed shooting at turkeys. Early on, I probably didn't even understand what we were doing out there in the bush, side-by-side for hours in the elements. But when I think back now, I remember how much he worked so that I would enjoy it. Everything was always set up for me, so that all I would have to do was show up. It happened like that for as long as I could remember and for every season from elementary to high school and then,

university. When I was in college, I would drive up for the weekend once a year to find my dad already in our spot with all our gear cleaned and oiled, grinning and ready.

I have since graduated from university, grown older, gotten married, and have my own children. I have no idea where I will be every summer, Christmas, or Thanksgiving but every year, on the first Saturday of April, I know I will be with my dad in the field. It is the one thing I can count on without fail.

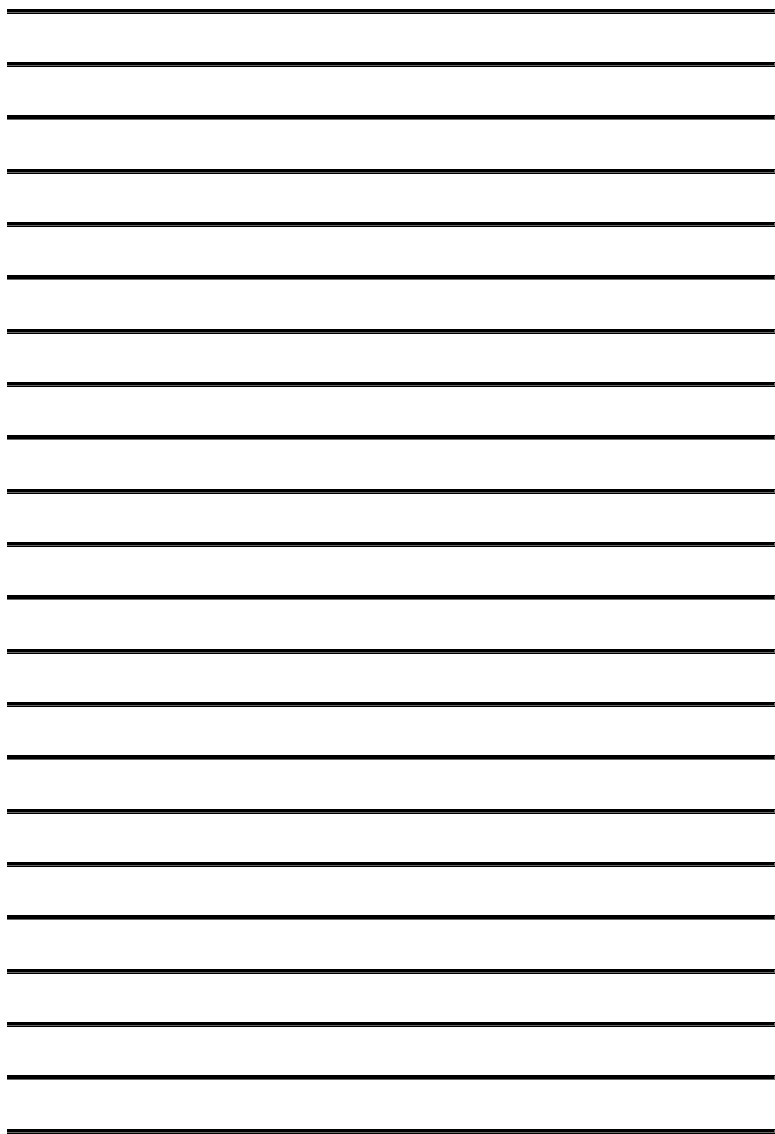
Now that he has gotten a little grayer and a lot wiser, the tables have turned a bit. These days, I'm the one in charge of loading the car with our supplies. I set up the chairs and the tents, prepare the food, and clean the guns. He will walk up to me when everything is ready, aided by a cane these days but always, still grinning. We'd hope to shoot a turkey side-by-side until the sun sets.

My dad has always loved the outdoors. He has given me 33 perfect summer days, on top of all the other days in our loving home. We are already planning Turkey Day #34. What is special about this year is that I'm going to be bringing my son with me for the first time. He turns seven this spring, the same age I was when my dad first brought me hunting.

I will always be grateful beyond words. My dad has given me this one day as anchor, so that I can give this one day to my son: and he, hopefully to his. For as long as is humanly possible, it will be our thing - me, my dad, and my son's.

Gratefully,

Jeff Kenney



“I would maintain that thanks are
the highest form of thought, and
that gratitude is happiness
doubled by wonder.”

Gilbert K. Chesterton

The Company was Only a Bonus

Do you know that thing they say about start-ups sometimes? How sometimes they rise quickly, just to crash as fast? That was almost my story.

I started a business with my daughter in late 2010. By mid-2012, we had somehow grown so big that we were handling multi-million-dollar orders out of our offices. We weren't ready for it at all.

As that same year ended, we were \$7 million dollars in debt. Despite \$32 million in sales, we owed \$6.5 million to our wholesaler, \$4 million of which was already late by 60 days. Our Chief Finance Officer had stolen upwards of \$270,000 because our books were in such disarray. Every time I walked into our office, it felt like walking into a nightmare. For months, it was just call after call from people asking for more money –

our suppliers, our retailers, and finally, the bank. Some mornings I was so paralyzed, I would stay in bed, just thinking about how I would even begin to fix it all.

When you become a parent, the world automatically ascribes hero to the end of your name. We're supposed to teach our children good manners; instill in them a sense of integrity; and save them from their general troubles. I was lucky enough that, this time around, my daughter saved me.

My daughter was our Chief Operating Officer. She had always deferred to me when it came to business decisions, largely by virtue of seniority, but those tumultuous months flipped a switch. One morning, she came into the office, set her hands on my table, and said to leave everything up to her. From then on, she came into work single-mindedly. She listed every one of our issues and tackled each until she found workable

solutions. She called all of our stakeholders - our partners, our vendors, our clients - to explain our situation and negotiate for new deadlines. She was brutally transparent with our employees and investors. She brought them onto the same page as us, and that came with this generous level of understanding and patience on their parts. Suddenly, they were bringing in their friends, who were experts in their respective fields, to try and help us identify the loopholes in our operations. Ironically, it took the threat of bankruptcy to make us a team.

It went on like this for 19 months. It was 19 months of back-and-forth calls, rewriting our processes, and making payments and adjustments where we could. In some magical way and on top of everything else already on her plate, my daughter also consistently found the time to ask me how I was doing. She never wavered in her belief that we would ride this tide. She remained committed to our employees,

our vendors and our customers. Whenever I doubted our new plans, she would sit me down and calm me. "It's just a puzzle, dad", she always used to say. "All we have to do is figure out how to put it all together."

We eventually enjoyed a successful exit. We'd travelled from the brink of bankruptcy to the sale of a successful Company.

During that 19-month time frame I was crippled with fear and indecision. Our success was solely due to the fact that she was behind me holding me up. Regretfully, I never one time asked her how she was doing nor expressed my gratitude to her.

I'm so grateful for her strength, loyalty, resolution, and character.

With Gratitude,
Leonard Lynskey

“He is a wise man who does not
grieve for the things which he has
not, but rejoices for those which he
has.”

Epictetus

I Have Been Gifted a Second Life

When I was ten, I had the great luck of joining my best friend's family on their annual ski trip. As a kid, I had always loved winter—I was always the first one out of bed on snow days, and the last one in after a day of building snowmen and snow forts—but I never saw it like I saw it during that vacation. Everything was white as far as the eye could see.

The week was a dream. We went snowboarding every single day under clear, cloudless skies. We were on the lifts for what was maybe the last ride of the trip when I got the sudden urge to see the most of the mountain. We got off at the very top, unhooked our boards, sat side-by-side on the powdery snow, and waited for everyone else to arrive.

From where we sat, we could see down the entire valley into Sweden and through to the border of Norway. Before that day, I had never felt so small and so big at the same time. I turned to catch

the view behind me, and it was even more amazing—all rugged terrain and untouched mountain. It also happened instantaneously. One moment, I was craning my head for a view; and the next, I was slipping backwards down the mountain called the White Elevator.

I remember picking up speed as I went down, rolling past rocks with sharp edges and hitting trees that showered with me ice. Every bump felt like the wind was being pulled right out of my chest. I could feel my clothes getting pushed up around my neck, which made it even harder to breathe. I couldn't get any traction on the soft snow.

I don't know how far I went or how long it lasted, but I eventually realized that I was slowing down. I came to a stop on a mountain ledge surrounded by trees. Through the ringing in my ears, I heard the sound of an engine running at high speed. A snowmobile crew had seen me falling down the mountain and come to rescue me. They found a kid covered in snow, but with all bones otherwise intact.

My best friend and his family were waiting outside the resort when the rescue team and I arrived. Their faces lit up with unbridled joy and gratitude when they saw me, safe and in one piece. I will always remember how it felt when they each hugged me in turn. That moment taught me to be thankful for the blessing of life.

Every morning since I was old enough to reflect on that trip, I've written in my journal. Every day, I list three things I am thankful for. If it happens to be a person on my list, I make it a point to

tell them in words. William Arthur Ward said, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present without giving it". I have been gifted with a second life. I thank everyone for it every single day.

So Grateful,

Christoffer Nettleblatt

“Joy is the simplest form of
gratitude.”

Karl Barthe

Gratitude Has Made Me Better

It was one of those days when I felt like I had more things to do than time. At eight in the morning, I already had a thousand thoughts running through my head. My most pressing concern was getting the oil in my wife's car changed. I was halfway out the door when she called out after me and offered to help back the car from the garage. "It's a little tight", she added.

I'd gained a few pounds since we got married and was mightily defensive about it. I stalled for a split second and realized that her question had embarrassed me. I refused on principle.

True enough, our cars were almost kissing each other. I was standing in our driveway, contemplating the Herculean task of moving my things, getting in the car, and then driving it out,

when I accepted that my belly was literally in the way. I trudged back into our house to take my wife up on her offer.

My brow was furrowed on my way to the mechanic's. It wasn't the start to the day that I wanted. I couldn't understand why she had parked her car so close to mine in the first place, but that thought soon gave way to a kind of awakening. Why was I looking for faults where there were none? Shouldn't I be grateful instead? That moment of introspection wholly changed things for me.

A couple of days later, I was at work when I stumbled upon some videos of Brené Brown. In these videos, she talked about how there was a strong misconception that happiness was a prerequisite for gratefulness, in that only happy people could practice gratitude, but she went on to say that this wasn't true. In fact, gratitude

begets happiness. It immediately brought me back to my encounter with my wife.

I have amazing marriage, a beautiful home, and the life of my dreams. The only thing that has changed now is that I see them. It has been a year and six months of appreciating the good things, as well as the bad things.

Gratitude has made me a better husband, teammate, and leader. I am happier and calmer by far.

I'm Grateful,

Mark Pfluger

“In all things give thanks...”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

“Gratitude is the sign of noble
souls.”

Aesop

A Mother's Pride

I had a difficult childhood. My father was a drunk, but my mother loved him dearly. We both lost him when I was seven months old, and my mother has never been the same since.

To my mother's credit, she raised me to the best of her abilities. We had warm food on the table for every meal. She changed our broken lightbulbs and fixed the leaky faucets under the sink. As far as I was concerned, she had the biggest toolbox on our street.

When I was five, my mother was rushed to the hospital because she suffered from a slipped disc. For the rest of my childhood, it was always me standing in the living room, watching her leave for one doctor's appointment after another. Sometimes, our neighbors would come over to distract me while she was away. A couple

of hours later, we would both watch her limping up the steps to our door, her face twisted in pain.

I was in high school when I realized that my mother was sad a lot of the time because she wished that she was with my dad up in Heaven. Looking back, it should have made me reach out to her, but it made me angry instead. I got furious enough that I ran away from home. It would be over ten years before I would get in touch with her again.

At 28, I was in a bad place. I was also a mother by this time and in an abusive relationship with my daughter's father. I reached out to my mom because I knew that she had gone through the same. Those conversations with her were some of the most difficult I have ever had with anyone in my entire life. When I finally found the courage to leave my relationship, my mother and I weren't any closer.

I first met my now husband when I was 25. We met again when I was 32. He makes me think about life's timing very often. I am unimaginably thankful that he came into my world twice. I love him because he loves my daughter as if she were his own. I love him because he brought my mother back to me.

When we first got married, he would drive over a couple of states to pick my mother up just so that she could spend the weekend with us. They would talk about everything the entire drive back. My mother often said that she had never had so much fun in her life. And then she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

At the worst of it, she was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation every few days. She had 30 different types of medicine for the cancer and a couple more for what the cancer medication did to her. She fought it like a champion. She started exercising despite the

nausea from the chemotherapy. She quit smoking when she had been smoking for as long as I've known her. We stopped fighting. The cancer disappeared.

Until today, I'm not sure when things turned. One moment, we were laughing in the car on a hot summer day, and the next, she was smoking a cigarette out on our porch. I was livid. When the cancer returned, none of us were surprised. The doctor said she had one year, one year and a half at most. My mother refused treatment and moved back to her house.

Over the next few weeks, I would call as often as I could. One Friday, she picked up the phone and couldn't remember that she had a cat. I borrowed my neighbor's car the very same hour and drove up to her.

I was frantic when I arrived at her house. It felt like I couldn't get through the door fast enough.

But when she answered, she had the most peaceful smile on her face. She gave me a hug and welcomed me in. We talked candidly into the night. She had come to terms with her diagnosis. She told me about her day. She said she was happy. I insisted on spending the night, but she refused, saying I should spend time with my family. As I was closing the door behind me, she tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I'm proud of you, Michelle. I couldn't be any prouder".

She passed away on a Sunday. Emergency services found her unconscious on her living room couch. I made it to her bedside that night. The doctor said the cancer had spread to her brain. I held her hand until she saw the light and sang her the songs, she used to sing to me when I was five.

My mother's name was Lena. She brought me up single-handedly and gave me a beautiful

childhood and an amazingly fulfilling life. I am alive because of her. For all the remaining days of my life, she will continue to live through me.

I'm Grateful,

Michelle Quick

“What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude.”

Dr. Brene' Brown

A Lifetime in 13 Year

We've always joked that my dad lucked out in the health department. As a child, he was impossibly tall, enough that his doctors worried about his height. He contracted polio when he was a teenager leaving him with a pronounced limp. In his adulthood, he was diagnosed with brain cancer.

When you're eight and your dad gets diagnosed with brain cancer, it never really hits home. At eight, I was playing on swings and jumping around in sandboxes. I never understood how bad it was or how scared I should have been. He battled cancer for five years.

In that time, he underwent two brain operations and an endless number of radiation treatments. All of these left a long scar running across the side of his head. He lost the use of his left eye,

which was eventually sewn shut because it gave him double vision.

My family had always made a thing of weekly dinners. We went to a small neighborhood restaurant on one of those nights. We were seated next to a family with an adorable boy, who couldn't keep his eyes away from my 6'6", limping, one-eyed father. Through the whole meal, the little boy's parents tried distracting him to no avail. The thing about my father is that he absolutely loved life. He always had this energy about him that radiated joy. He talked through dinner and enjoyed his meal, seemingly oblivious to the little boy.

As we headed out of the restaurant, he wound around our table and headed towards the child. With a big smile, he knelt beside the boy's seat and whispered theatrically that he was a pirate. He winked with his good eye for added effect.

The little boy's face lit up in excitement, and his parents relaxed into their seats in sighs of relief.

As he drove all of us home, my dad quickly turned to my sister and I to tell us that the little boy meant him no harm. He was curious, and that was perfectly okay. Even at that age, my father knew he needed to leave examples of kindness for us. To this day, I understand how much comfort can help.

My dad passed away when I was 13, and I still think about him every single day. But while I wish that he could have been there at my graduation and given me away at my wedding, I've since changed. These days, I wish that, at the very least, I grow to be as kind as him. My father was an amazing, beautiful man. He gave me a lifetime in 13 years. He will always be my angel.

Be Grateful,
Denise Reed

“Thankfulness is the quickest path
to joy.”

Jefferson Bethke

The Gratitude Jar

My family life is serene. I am married to a beautiful wife and have an amazing son and daughter. We have dinner together every night. We travel once a year. I honestly couldn't be any happier. But for the longest time too, I always felt like something was missing. It always seemed like we were waiting for a big event or celebration that had yet to come. My wife and I talked about it often – how it felt like there was a big disconnect between real life and our perception of it. The gratitude jar changed all that.

Since its inception, the gratitude jar has been front and center in all of our family dinners. At each meal, everyone is required to add a popsicle stick to the jar. On that popsicle stick, each of us had to write what we were most grateful for, for that day. At the end of the year, we would gather around the jar, our own

Thanksgiving of sorts, to read out what was written. Through the years, we have been thankful for: a chocolate chip cookie; a promotion; a parking slot when it was most needed; being chosen as the lead in the play; an extra umbrella; and making the football team. Big and small; we were thankful for all of them, and it has changed how we count our days.

Writing my blessings down has made me so aware of everything that I have been given. It offered me perspective and made my troubles tiny, especially during these crazy times and with COVID sneaking into everyone's homes.

2020 was a hard year, but our jar has taught us to take our little wins in stride. My family is whole and **healthy. Today and for all days, that is something to be grateful for.**

So Grateful,

Enitza and David Rivera

“Gratitude is not only the greatest
of virtues, but the parent of all
others.”

Cicero

The Thank You Game

My husband was in the greatest shape of his life, but he collapsed from a heart attack on February 25, 2019. We lost him three days later. He was 39-years old.

My husband was everything I could ever ask for. We had been married for 13 years, and he was the heart of our home. He ran the house, helped our kids with their homework, drove them to every single practice, and was there, cheering their names, for every single game. Whenever I traveled for work, which was often, he snuck the kids out from school and took them to the movies. They absolutely adored him.

When he passed away, I worried the most about how our children would take the news. What I didn't expect was for them to say that they wanted to go to school the very next day and be

in the company of their friends. The days that followed became a period of grieving and not grieving. I busied myself with trying to shoulder all the work that my husband used to do for the kids, and the kids pretended that everything was the same.

Before we knew it, it was April. I had applied to a leadership seminar a couple of months back, and I was suddenly faced with the decision of whether to push through with it or not. At that time, I couldn't even fathom leaving my kids for the week that the training was supposed to take place, but my friends convinced me to go. After all, I had signed up for it so I could help run the business my late husband had started before he passed.

Most of those five days were a blur, because my head was thinking of home half of the time, but there was one exercise that changed my life. One afternoon, we were all seated by the lake

for a quietness, meditation, and gratitude practice. Everyone's eyes were closed. We were all just listening to the sounds of nature when I suddenly broke down in loud tears and couldn't stop. I felt one hand on my shoulder, and then another, and then another, and it suddenly felt like a weight was lifted from my chest. I talked to a new friend that night about all my worries for my kids - how they weren't doing as well in school as I'd hoped, how it always felt like they were looking for their dad instead of me, but he put his hand on my shoulder too and told me to consider the things I'm grateful for instead.

When I got back home the following weekend, I was a changed person. I passed by the store and got all my kids' favorite food. I asked my boys to come to my room, snack-bribes in hand, and told them that we were starting a new thank-you tradition. We then took turns saying what we were thankful for the most.

In the beginning, they only named the big things. They were thankful for their new phone, the new pool, and the occasional fancy meal. It took a couple of tries before they started saying thank you for the little things too, like how the bus wasn't late and that the weather was good when they played.

My kids have grown up a bit in the last year. We still play the thank-you game every day, but it has changed a bit since. Most days these days, we say what we're thankful for in each other instead. We still talk about Dad often. I still cry and miss him often, but we also feel a lot more like a family now. My biggest takeaway from these two crazy years is that both of my kids can talk about their feelings with ease. I can only hope that this can make them half as great of a person as the love of my life.

Gratefully,

Sejal Lakhiani-Bhatt

“When you arise in the morning
give thanks for the food and for the
joy of living. If you see no reason
for giving thanks, the fault lies only
in yourself.”

Tecumseh

I Listened

I spent the summer of 1986 as a doorman for the Hyatt Regency in Fort Worth, Texas. I was halfway through college at that time, trying to earn enough to make it all the way, and as far as summer jobs went, I couldn't have asked for a better one. All summer, the weather was perfectly sunny, and the guests were nice.

I remember one guest in particular; Kenneth Copeland from Kenneth Copeland Ministries was staying at the hotel because he was holding a seminar across the street. I opened the door for him enough times that I got curious and decided to visit. I watched from the back as he told a full room that God blessed the rich, so the rich must bless God in return. I remember feeling sick to my stomach when I heard that because I had worked my whole life just to make ends meet but I've never felt like I've met God or God

introduced himself to me. I was lost in my head for the rest of that shift, wondering if any of the things I knew about Him was right or real.

After that summer, I was driving the long route back to college, taking the quiet roads in my little red Honda, when God finally spoke to me. He said that if I really wanted to know him, it was time; and that I should leave my friends and bad influences for a new life. I turned the volume of the radio down and the voice was still there, just as clear and just as loud, telling me, "it is time". I turned my life around that very same day and embraced God and the Bible.

Up until now, when I tell my friends this story, I still don't know how to explain how grateful I felt that God showed up for me and decided I was worth it. Here was this Man who had a perfectly sinless Son, and he was reaching out to me, asking me to know him. From the moment I understood that it was Him speaking, I also

understood that I wasn't worth it. Yet, there he remained, extending a hand.

Today, I am the father to four beautiful daughters and the husband to an amazing wife. They all help me with my ministry. Each day, I am acutely aware of how much I don't deserve any of them. But that is the glory of how God works. He blesses not the rich but those who are willing to listen. I've listened since that day behind the wheel when he opened my heart. I only ask that others listen too

Gratefully,

Steve Greig

“When you are grateful, fear
disappears, and abundance
appears.”

Tony Robbins

A Christmas Miracle

I spent the first 10 years of my career making money, and I was very good at it. In 2011 I had successful businesses, a beautiful house, wonderful children, and a lovely new wife whom I adored. But something was terribly wrong. Previously, the "acquisition" satisfied something inside of me. But now I just felt empty inside. When I bought that new exotic sports car, the one I had dreamed about my entire life, I felt sad the next day. I had everything I was supposed to want, yet nothing was ever enough. The void was never filled On the outside I was living the dream On inside, I was often home alone crying myself to sleep.

That all changed on a trip to Las Vegas. I was getting a shoeshine from a man by the name of Enrique He had a Bible open near his work station, which was quite the juxtaposition in "Sin City" I asked him to tell me about it He asked me

if I knew Jesus Of course I knew Jesus- I was raised Catholic! So he started to read, to share the word and to pray Soon we both were in tears. That day I found my new purpose and that was living for a man who walked the earth more than 2,000 years ago That day I found Jesus Christ.

The following day I was introduced to Tiger Todd through a mutual friend and EO member Tiger had left his successful electronics company to create the Hero School This is a program that transforms the lives of the homeless in Las Vegas by getting them their identity and reintroducing them into the work force Tiger drove me through the streets of the city, allowing me to witness his intervention and introduction to those living under bridges and massive tent parks. He told them he could change their lives if they would just let him. And they have "let him" Tiger, through the Hero School, has gotten 1000's of homeless people off

the streets and given them their dignity. I was stunned by the experience. I realized that Tiger was living out his purpose and meaning by helping others.

Shortly thereafter, I became very ill For several years I suffered from an autoimmune disease that attacked most of my body systems I traveled to Johns Hopkins and Duke medical centers trying to find answers and relief I had pains throughout my entire body, swollen glands, and severe digestive issues For over 2 years, I struggled to get out of bed and could not leave my home most days I was put on countless medications by multiple specialists Nothing was helping But in this pain and seclusion, there was gift Time in prayer I used this time to really dive into The Word and found the answers I really needed in the Bible I re-centered what I was willing to work for During this time I was also baptized and introduced to Robin and Martha, two prophetic women who helped me finally heal completely.

I am forever grateful for that shoeshine I returned to the same station several years ago and asked for Enrique I gave his name and description I was told that no such man ever worked there So perhaps he was an angel. Ever since that day, my life has not been the same. I have never believed in coincidences. I know that God has put every piece of my life together He placed me in that hotel, in Enrique's chair, through the skid row of Vegas with Tiger, and with Robin and Martha All of this needed to happen for my ultimate healing to come together This has set me off on a new journey with a new purpose I am still full of the entrepreneur spirit, but I find every chance I can to share the love that Jesus has shown me in such an extraordinary way.

Thanks and Gratitude,

Frank Tommaso

“Gratitude makes sense of our past,
brings peace for today, and creates
a vision for tomorrow.”

Melody Beattie

I'm Going to Build a Library

When people think about growing up in Russia, they picture snow, vodka, and Stalin; and it couldn't be further from the truth. I grew up in Ukraine behind what people would call a white picket fence. My parents and grandparents doted on me and showered me with presents. One birthday, it would be a bicycle; and the next, I would be opening the wrappings around a rocking horse.

Because I grew up in this abundance, I guess I also never learned to appreciate it all. Worse so, I started expecting that I could have anything and everything. I remember, clear as day, refusing to ride that brand-new bicycle because it was the wrong color. The next week, my grandparents got me the right one.

I grew up stubborn, as a result, and impatient. My mother loved books. Throughout my childhood, she would try to read to me, but I could never sit still long enough for her to finish a story. When I was old enough to enter school, it was the exact same thing. My professors would try to teach me literature, history, or mathematics - it wouldn't matter! - but my mind would be up in the clouds as soon as I entered the room. Getting through my textbooks was the largest struggle.

I was 27 and jumping from one job to another when I decided to get a dog. I had resolved to walk him every afternoon but soon learned that I didn't like walking in the quiet. While looking for music online, I stumbled across some self-help audio books, of all things, and decided to give them a try. I loaded them onto my iPod and set out for the first few walks that would eventually change my life.

It started slowly enough. I began with biographies but that soon turned into marketing books and then books on business. Before I was aware of it, I started walking my dog for longer periods. I finished one book a week and I've been walking my dog for 20 years.

The greatest change from all this listening was that I suddenly became more aware of myself. All throughout my life, I've been told that I wasn't maximizing my potential. I was told that practice makes perfect; and that if we practice enough, we eventually become good at whatever we set our minds to. But that's not true. Not everyone can learn to dance just because they decide to. When I stopped resisting who I was and instead celebrated it, learning became a tremendous joy. I still struggle to focus a lot but these days, I know to give myself enough time as is necessary to learn a thing well. Today, I am infinitely more comfortable in my own skin.

I am also the lucky father to a daughter now. The irony of ironies is that she absolutely adores books. She read through the entire Harry Potter series when she was just eight or nine. It is the biggest blessing watching her read and seeing her insatiable thirst for learning grow each day. It is currently my life's mission to build her the library my mother never got to build me.

Grateful,

Vlad Gendelman

“I can no other answer make, but,
thanks, and thanks, and ever
thanks.”

William Shakespeare

14 hours to Forever

Every six weeks or so, I would get on a 14-hour flight from Los Angeles to Australia for a week's worth of business meetings. After a while, I was taking the same trip so often that it felt effortless; it felt more like a weekend drive than a cross-continental flight. I always booked the same routes, flew in my favorite seat, and spent the week in one of either two hotels depending on whether I was working out of Sydney or Melbourne. I had it down to clockwork.

I was waiting to get on one of those Qantas flights when I suddenly realized that I felt a back ache, like the way muscles are sore from a day in the gym, and the beginnings of a cold. Before I could give it more thought, however, my flight pulled in. I fell in line to board, as I have fallen in line so many times before. I figured it was just all the work finally catching up to me; it had

been a long couple of weeks, if not a long year. I was seven hours into my fourteen-hour flight when my body started shutting down.

It started gently enough. When they served the in-flight meal, I realized I was having some difficulty swallowing. Mid-way through service, my stomach started revolting. I dragged myself to the lavatory. The first thing I noticed was how ashen I looked in the mirror. I had black marks under my eyes. My lips were so dry, they had started cracking. I soon realized my other bodily functions had left me too. I was unable to urinate even if I wanted to.

I stumbled back onto my seat and quickly informed the crew. They talked about making an emergency landing, but I knew as well as they did that there would be nothing but water below us until we hit Australia. I got worse and worse over the next six hours.

They carried me off the plane on a stretcher as soon as we hit the tarmac and brought me straight to the doctor's office. My friend, Phil Scanlon, was waiting for me by the door.

The doctor quickly figured out that I had sepsis. The infection had worked its way through my blood as I flew over the Pacific. They whisked me into a hospital soon after. 24 hours after I had gotten on the plane, I was hooked to IV lines in the Intensive Care Unit halfway around the world.

Phil and I had always been good friends, but I'll never forget what he did for me that time. Instead of going home to his family, he got the hospital to put a bed next to mine. He stayed with me for the next two weeks. When I felt well enough to walk, it was Phil who wheeled me out of the hospital and onto a plane.

When people hear about that experience and ask me what was like, I still always say I got better because I had someone to talk to while I was there, hooked to monitors that beeped into the night. I almost lost my life in Australia, but I learned an important lesson. Sometimes the best medicine is the comfort of knowing someone is there. I found a life-long friend and brother over the course of those two weeks. I try to pay it forward by being more present with my friends and family every single day.

In Gratitude,

Warren Rustand

“Strive to find things to be thankful
for, and just look for the good in
who you are.”

Bethany Hamilton

A 57 Year Love Story

I've played basketball for as long as I can remember; and I spent most of my high school years training, learning, and living on that court. When Senior Year came around, I was lucky enough to be offered scholarships to play college basketball all over the state. I toured campuses and poured through programs but what struck me the most was meeting the coach of the University of Arizona. I immediately knew that he could make me the kind of player I wanted to be. I made the move from Southern California the following year and never looked back.

On my third day in the University of Arizona, a friend introduced me to this beautiful, intelligent young woman. She was bright, opinionated, and had this amazing light-up-the-room energy. I was convinced that I had to get to know her. I

asked her out, right on the spot. She didn't miss a beat and turned me down, right on the spot too.

Now, this was hard news to take for an athlete. I breezed through high school because of my physique. I never had problems getting the girl. Yet here was this woman, saying no to me without a second thought! If I learned anything from all those years of basketball though, it was that persistence is key. I asked her out again the following week, and the week after that. I asked her out for 53 straight weeks and each time, I got a "No".

By the time the 54th week came around, I was more than ready to give up on this game. It was also then, however, that I learned that she had been seeing someone else all through last year, and that he would be out of town this very weekend. I decided to try my luck one last time. She declined like she always did, and it was like

a switch flipped inside of me. I started singing, dancing, and telling jokes, anything to make her smile. Finally, she broke out laughing and agreed to have dinner with me. Halfway through dinner, we knew we were meant for each other. We got married 2 years later, while still in the middle of college.

We decided early on that we wanted to have a big family. We settled on 15 children because it was a good solid number and 15 had always been my jersey number. My wife would also insist that 15 was perfect because it matched my IQ.

We tried for years to get pregnant. Four years into our marriage, we finally decided to get checked. Our doctors told us that it was biologically impossible for us to have children. We were devastated but the decision to adopt came easily. We went through all the motions, filed all the papers, and waited for our turn to

become parents. One fateful night, while at a cocktail party thrown by one of our friends, we met a young doctor who happened to be a fertility specialist. He asked us to take a chance and come into the hospital for some tests the following day. A month after that meeting, my wife walked out of the hospital pregnant with our first child.

My wife got pregnant every other year for the next 14 years. We became the proud parents to 7 children - 6 boys and 1 girl - and are now the lucky grandparents to 14 amazing grandchildren. We all live in a large farm in the middle of Tucson, Arizona. The days stretch out, loud and beautiful.

Our story has been the longest lesson in the perfect timing. My wife has taught me what it truly means to commit to something, to keep trying and trusting despite the odds. In the 56 years that I have been married to her, I have

watched her grow into the finest mother and grandmother She still lights up every room she walks into, the same way she did when I first met her.

We will be celebrating our 57th year together in a few months. To this day, I only have one regret in my life - and that is that I didn't marry her sooner. She lifts us all up in every way.

Grateful to You,

Warren Rustand

“Wear gratitude like a cloak, and it will feed every corner of your life.”

Rumi

The House of Thank You

My father had been sick for a while, and the better part of the year had been spent in the hospital just sitting by his side. Most of those nights were the same. By then, my dad had grown so weak he was sleeping most of the time. There was a lot of quiet hand holding and a lot of TV watching.

One night, a young nurse came by to change the bandage on his heels. Even in his half-conscious state, my dad managed to whisper a clear "Thank you" as she finished wrapping his feet. The nurse paused midway through her motions and turned to me, asking "Does he always do that? Say thank you?"

I remember that my brow had furrowed in response. Her question had caught me by surprise. I looked at her and said, "Yes, it's the

one thing he and my mom always taught us to do.”

It has been some time since he's passed, but every day I am grateful that I received some kind of proof of his kindness that night. He had always been so generous with it all throughout his 94 years. Our house had always been filled with "thank you-s" left and right. Hearing someone acknowledge it brought me so much joy and honor to be called his daughter. He had lived a full life of kindness and love, and people, even strangers, were touched by it. I could only hope to do the same.

"Gratitude is riches.
Complaint is poverty."

Doris Day

Tell Me About Everyone You Have Ever Loved...and Why You Aren't With Them Now

Today it was finally my EO Forum training/initiation day and I was looking forward to a good time. I had signed up to join

Entrepreneurs' Organization to have fun hanging out with other successful local entrepreneurs. Today was our EO Forum training day. It's basically my first time really getting to know other EO members. There were eight other new Forum trainees that I had never met, sitting around the table. A couple of them sounded just crazy enough that I figured I was in the right place for a good time.

But when the session started, Nick the trainer was not talking about having fun. Nick was talking about being vulnerable with people we did not even know. I started feeling uneasy. And

at about the point where he said that each of us was going to learn to be more vulnerable than we had ever been before, I knew that this was not going to be fun...it sounded terrible! My marriage was on the rocks, and the last thing I needed was a bunch more drama in my life. I knew I needed to get out of that room ASAP and worry about getting my dues refunded later.

Unfortunately, I had chosen a place on the table far from the only exit. So, I was watching carefully, waiting for Nick to turn his back so I could quietly zip for the door. But instead, he must have sensed I was about to bolt, because he kept his eyes on me while he got his first victim, Craig to stand up and follow Nick's example of being vulnerable. Craig really bared his heart...it was fascinating to hear his story. After listening to Craig and then next lady's story I was almost in tears. I think I lost track of my escape plan. When it came my turn to stand

up and be vulnerable, I was soon bawling so much I could not talk at times.

It was a terribly embarrassing and soul cleansing experience all at once. But that day I learned to be vulnerable, why it mattered, and how enjoyable life could be with people who also were honest and vulnerable and real with each other. That one day changed my life dramatically.

A couple years later my marriage that had lasted 27 years was over. I was dating again at age 64, and after a series of not exactly perfect-match dates, I was looking forward to my first date with Annette. She seemed cute, witty, and perceptive. And she was.... more than I had expected. We sat on the couch after dinner, and after some small talk she says: "Tell me everyone you have ever loved, and why you are not with them now."

Before learning to be vulnerable at EO, I do not know what I would have answered. But I know that first night with Annette I looked into my soul and told her the truth. I told her everything. It was not pretty. I told her how what I did and did not do, caused my relationships to fail. I told her what my screw ups were, my failings, my bad judgements, and took responsibility for each of those failures. Because the truth is that I was not perfect or even close to it, ever.

I cried as I told her how I could have done a lot better in each failed relationship. I cried when I told her of each of the loves that I had lost. And at the end I told her that even though I might look like a successful businessman driving a Maserati, the truth is that I'm just a little boy that wants to be loved I was a bawling, blubbering mess. I thought she would leave.

But she didn't leave. She stayed and told me her story of the men she had loved, and she cried

about every one of them, and was real, honest, and adorable. I loved that she was honest and took responsibility for each one that failed. And I was glad she stayed.

I proposed to Annette two months later and we have been happily married now for four years.

I'm VERY, VERY grateful I found Annette. I'm grateful that she is adorable, amazing, and puts up with me! I'm grateful that EO helps people like me learn to be vulnerable so we can live better lives and be better human beings. And I'm grateful that Nick the trainer was perceptive enough to keep me from bolting from that room that morning, or none of this would have happened.

In Gratitude,

Walter Monk

“Thankfulness is the beginning of
gratitude. Gratitude is the
completion of thankfulness.

Thankfulness may consist merely of
words. Gratitude is shown in acts.”

Henri Frederic Amiel

The Gift of Trust

“Today I choose to live with gratitude for the love that fills my heart, the peace that rests within my spirit, and the voice of hope that says all things are possible.” – Anonymous

Many years ago, early in our marriage, my husband Jamie and I decided that we would not have children of our own. We both love children; however, we had no family close by in Los Angeles and lived here alone, had recently started our business and our circumstances and lifestyle led us to make this important and impactful decision.

My husband has 3 siblings, one in Chicago who has two children, a brother in San Francisco who has three children, and a sister who lives in Switzerland who also has three kids. So, I am

grateful to have had plenty of kids in our lives and didn't feel compelled to have my own.

However, every story has unexpected gifts and surprises And this is a story of gratitude for my sister-in-law and her husband who trusted me enough to give me a chance to be a second mother to their three children.

Eighteen years ago, they moved from Switzerland to Los Angeles so my brother-in-law could attend UCLA for his MBA. At the time they had two little boys, ages 3 and 1 and they settled in a home less than 2 miles away from ours During their time here, they had a third child.

She had decided to have a homebirth which at the time was very popular here in Santa Monica. She hired a doula to help her with the birth and asked me....me! to be her birth coach.

I took my duties seriously. After all, responsibility is my #1 one strength on the Clifton Strengths finder test, even though I didn't know it at the time.

We went to numerous breathing classes, prenatal yoga classes, and took long walks around the neighborhood preparing for the day

As the date approached, the doula and her crew came and set up what looked like a giant hot tub in the living room My brother-in-law and the two little boys moved into my house to be with Jamie, and I moved into their home to await the arrival of the baby We did not know at the time whether it was a boy or a girl, although my sister-in-law really wanted a baby girl.

Towards the middle of November, the day finally came, and contractions started We waited, paced, and breathed My sister-in-law had decided on having a natural childbirth without

epidural or other drugs The doula and her three assistants, plus my mother-in-law and a good friend of ours were in the room awaiting the arrival of the little one....and it didn't happen. For 5 days, there would be daily neck and back massages, breathing together, handholding and getting ready for the baby, and trying to keep the hot tub water warm. And for 5 days contractions would begin at 6 PM and end around 2 AM and no baby would arrive.

Finally on the 6th day, at 12:22 AM a little baby girl made her debut floating in the hot tub and I got to experience the magic of birth, as close to firsthand as possible. A special relationship was born between us on that day.

Jamie and I became guardians to all three kids and spent summers together when the family moved away from LA to Japan and then back to Switzerland. When the kids got a bit older, they started to travel on their own and come stay

with us in LA for weeks without their parents.
The five of us have created a very special
relationship, one that has allowed me to become
a second mother.

I am grateful for the trust that someone else had
in me to be there with them in one of the most
spectacular moments in their life is a gift that I
will cherish forever.

I am grateful that someone trusts me to be the
guardians of their children.

I am grateful for the gift of trust,
Katty Douraghy

Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed your journey into your Daily Practice of Gratitude. I encourage you to stay with it. If you miss a day - it's no big deal just start again the next day. Remember the more you practice gratitude with intention the more grateful you'll become. And the more grateful you become, the more contentment and peace you'll experience.

I'm grateful to have a small part in your progress.

Thank You.

I'm grateful!

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About the Author



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