

Giving Thanks

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I admit it, I am not a huge fan of the winter holiday season. I don't know if it's the memory of growing up in lean times; the fact that I work with a population of young people who often react negatively at this time of year; the increased focus on material goods equalling happiness; the illumination of loss (remembering loved ones we have lost who can't be with us at this festive time); or some combination of all four of these.

I only know that, every year around mid-November, the stress in my shoulders starts to build until it would appear as though my head is supported completely by my shoulders, with no neck to speak of... Who knows, maybe it's a chicken-or-the-egg question, and it's indiscernible whether anticipation of the oncoming stress attracts difficult experiences, or vice versa. I've tried just about everything I can think of to combat this annual malady: massage, overindulgence, escape, refusal to participate in long-standing traditions, and hibernation (which must require a great deal of tranquilizers and slightly more body fat than what I currently possess). But, nothing has worked, and every year the holidays arrive, unbidden and with seemingly more haste than the year before.

This year, my first holiday season since I've been divorced, I've been holding my breath a bit, bracing myself for being "alone" (translation: without a significant other and a family who lives a few states away) for the first time in as long as I can remember. I wonder if the house will sell in the new year, if my single income will be enough, how soon I will need a new car, and whether I will ever be in love again. In some ways, I realize, I've been holding my breath in anticipation of this being the worst holiday season ever. But, as I write this column and look back, I notice that every one of my hypotheses for why this time of year might be tough focuses on something that is *missing*, something that I, or those around me, *don't* have. And I begin to see that I give my typical outlook on life, the one that I have sometimes struggled to maintain, a vacation this time of year. I have allowed myself to focus on what's missing, and I have missed a million things for which to be thankful.

In this past year, I have learned how self-sufficient and strong I truly am. My background has helped teach me that material items and external wealth are NOT commensurate with happiness. I adopted a 4-year-old rescue dog two weeks ago, and he has been my constant and unconditional

companion who wakes me up in the mornings laughing and greets me at the door when I come home from work. I know a family that was homeless this time last year, and today they have a warm and safe place to live. I completed several races in 2008, improved my mountain biking ability, broke a personal record, and survived an experience involving a barbed-wire fence that literally should have killed me.

For the first time in my life, I felt comfortable letting ALL of my colorful personality loose, which was partly illustrated when I completed at least half of the aforementioned events wearing my adult-size wonder woman Underroos® on the *outside* of my clothes ('cuz what fun is it to have superhero underwear if no one gets to see?). Perhaps most important, looking back on this year, I have a complete self-constructed Colorado "family" with whom I am spending Thanksgiving, and a job that I absolutely LOVE, both of which accept me just as I am despite, and even because of, that aforementioned colorful personality.

So, I sit here knowing that it is really true: a person's outlook on life becomes largely positive or negative based on where they choose to aim their focus. Sometimes, it can be difficult to appreciate the beauty of the Colorado Rockies because of the "brown cloud" of smog, but that beauty is always there to be appreciated, and the smog can make the sunsets more even more gorgeous! (Okay, that is a REALLY bad analogy that is definitely non-eco-friendly, but I came up with it on the fly with my incredibly holiday-muddled brain, and so I'm gonna use it anyways and be thankful!). May you enjoy the upcoming season with your friends and loved-ones.

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