

Celebrating Gratitude

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“Happiness is a journey, not a destination.” That is one of my all-time favorite quotes. It reminds me that happiness doesn’t magically arrive out of nowhere when we reach a final goal (such as a promotion, getting that degree, purchasing the next got-to-have-it toy, making more money, or going on vacation). Instead, happiness is a state of mind — in many cases, it is a conscious choice that we get to make daily, hourly, or even by the minute. Research tells me that one of the ways to be happy is to be happy on the journey, instead of always reaching for the elusive next horizon that represents happiness. That is, it is to be thankful on a daily basis for what we already have.

Speaking metaphorically, it’s difficult to see the brown cloud of smog when we focus on the mountains. That doesn’t mean that we should just ignore the smog. That wouldn’t be realistic. From time to time, we need to come down from the mountain and problem solve. We need to remove barriers that have arisen. Yet focusing on the many things that are *already* in our lives – for which we are grateful – is something we can try to do each day.

During this Thanksgiving season, when the nationwide economy continues to struggle, I believe, perhaps more than ever, in the power of being grateful. I asked some reliable sources about which particular Thanksgiving memories stand out in their minds. The memories range across people and cultures, ages, backgrounds, and spiritual beliefs. But, they all hold one very important thing in common: none of them focus on materialistic themes. Every single memory is about togetherness; helping others in need; and embracing happiness in the moment despite circumstances outside of our control. I hope the following memories of others uplift you:

- “When I was a kid, my mom would pile us all into the car (a *huge* station wagon with wood panelling on the sides) and drive us to the shelter on Thanksgiving. All of us worked all day serving food to people in need. We shared the meal with them, socialized, and talked about our families and memories. I resented spending the day like that at times when I was a kid, but now I look back on those times as wonderful! I carry on the tradition with my kids now, and they love it!” – Aliasha, 46
- “One year I was a teacher in a school for kids with abuse issues. At Thanksgiving time, we had a feast that the kids and staff prepared. Before we ate, everyone gathered in a circle and took turns saying what they were grateful for. Kids were saying things like, ‘I’m thankful for my school,’ ‘I appreciate my clothes,’ ‘I’m grateful for turkey, and delicious food,’ ‘I’m glad my dad is home safe.’ “I was completely overwhelmed by the simple things, often taken for granted, that meant so much to the kids. I felt so much gratitude for everything in my life.” – Sam, 32

- “My family would write down things we were grateful for in a journal every year. It was so much fun going back and reading from the journal what we had written in past years. The things we listed would basically stay the same, but there would be enough of a difference for us to fondly recall people and situations from past years.” – Steve, in his 50s
- “The long weekend of Thanksgiving would bring about a friendly competition among my sisters, me, and my mom. All of us would try to personally thank as many people as possible for various, seemingly mundane, actions. One year, my older sister outdid us all. She asked to borrow the microphone from an employee at a fast food restaurant. She thanked all of the employees for their hard work and excellent service. Everyone in the restaurant ended up giving the employees a standing ovation!” – Tiffany, 41
- “I’ll never forget the ‘Peanuts dinners’ I would have with my closest friends in college when money was real tight. All of us would be on campus over the holidays for one reason or another. We would all prepare and bring our favorite food to share. If the favorite was popcorn, that’s what we’d bring. We called them ‘Peanuts dinners’ because they were just like the meal the kids ate in the old Charlie Brown Thanksgiving special. Many of the people who stayed on campus for the holidays were from overseas and unable to travel back home. That made for some very interesting food items and excellent conversation.” – Susan, 38

I wish you a happy season full of many things for which to be grateful.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network offers comprehensive behavioral health services for adults, seniors, families and children.

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