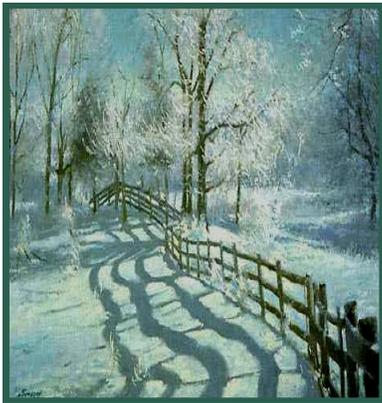




Counseling Connections

Ponderments and Gratitude



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

- Melody Beattie

The winter holidays are here. They seem to be many and diverse. Some require shopping, others cooking. There's the decorating and the sending of holiday wishes. The common thread is more to do when we are already busy. But there is another commonality and that is light in our darkness. Sometimes a very small flame in what seems like too much winter dusk. In winter we spend quite a bit of time focusing on those bright lights and I have been pondering one light of the season—gratitude.

My first thought is that I am too tired and busy to be grateful. What will gratitude do for me? It won't stand in line for me at the post office. As it turns out though, gratitude is not just an additional burden to the growing list of what we "should" be. Gratitude reduces stress and depression. It increases happiness and a sense of well-being. Gratitude even leads to better sleep. Acknowledging thankful feelings actually gives you more for which to be thankful.

This holiday season each of us will receive something for which to be grateful. It may be time off; it may be a gift from a loved one; it may be the smile we receive as we give a gift to someone else. Personally, I have had a long and difficult semester and for Christmas (which is what my family celebrates), I want an ideal holiday. I want that Christmas I remember where the whole family was together, the rooms were filled with love and laughter, bright decorations and fabulous food. I'm not sure which year that was—I always hope it is this year.

But this year may not be that ideal Christmas. My aunt, the last member of the parental generation of my family, is 94 years old this year. She is frail, which is strange to me. She is the matriarch of our family—she binds us together. It is she that preserves the traditions. But she no longer remembers the traditions, her mind wanders and we are losing her. In some ways we have already lost the strong, dynamic woman that created the boundaries of our lives, who shaped the family we have. This may be her last Christmas with us.

It will not feel like the holiday that I need and I feel overwhelmed and saddened. Gratitude is not my go-to in this situation. And yet, I am thankful.

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I am grateful to have time off, to see my family, to feel loved, to know dinner will be good, to know that I will be with people who try to be loving, in rooms that are warm. I am grateful to have friends whose company I enjoy and to live in Asheville where there is always something to do and something pretty to look at.

Mostly I am grateful that I have known my aunt, that I have had the chance to be close to my family and continue to try to be good to one another. And I am very grateful that even when my aunt cannot remember the events of yesterday, or last year, she knows she is loved. She is beset and harried by fond nagging, trips to the doctor and too many gifts for which she has no use. And she is surrounded by love, support, admiration and gratitude. And for this I am thankful.

I have been a part of her life, a part of her legacy and a part of the love she feels now. I am grateful for this and grateful that I will remember her with love. Grateful that I will have participated in creating and maintaining the loving family that will make her last days warm and caring.

This is not the gratitude list I imagined, but it is the gift I am receiving this year. It is one that I will remember .



R. Henry

A Gratitude Meditation

Start in your meditation posture with your eyes open. Take a couple of deep breaths and watch your chest rise and fall with each inhalation and exhalation. Take a moment to appreciate the automatic functioning of your lungs. Thank your lungs.

Next, close your eyes and become aware of your thoughts -- without judgment. Your mind might be evaluating this experience, or associating it with something pleasant or perhaps unpleasant. Whatever they are, thank your thoughts for the great job they do in keeping you aware and aligned with what is important to you.

Now scan your body and take time to thank the parts that you're particularly grateful for -- perhaps your feet for taking you where you want to go, perhaps for your hands for their strength. Whichever part you feel drawn to, thank it briefly and move on to another. Continue until you feel the gratitude surging.

Finally, connect with all the effort you give in creating your life. With the energy you put forth for taking care of yourself, taking care of others, contributing to our world. Feel the immensity of this energy in your heart. Breathe deeply into your heart center and allow your chest muscles to relax in the awareness of your good effort.

If your mind wanders to negative characteristics within yourself, gently return to the feeling of gratitude in your heart -- for all that you have, all that you give, all that you are. Meditate on this wonderful feeling of gratitude.



Although the roof is just a story high,
 It dizzies me a little to look down.
 I lariat-twirl the cord of Christmas lights
 And cast it to the weeping birch's crown;
 A dowel into which I've screwed a hook
 Enables me to reach, lift, drape, and twine
 The cord among the boughs so that the bulbs
 Will accent the tree's elegant design.

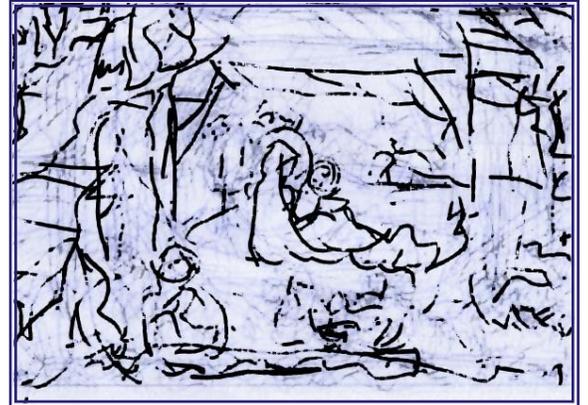
Friends, passing home from work or shopping, pause
 And call up commendations or critiques.
 I make adjustments. Though a potpourri
 Of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs,
 We all are conscious of the time of year;
 We all enjoy its colorful displays
 And keep some festival that mitigates
 The dwindling warmth and compass of the days.

Some say that L.A. doesn't suit the Yule,
 But UPS vans now like magi make
 Their present-laden rounds, while fallen leaves
 Are gaily resurrected in their wake;
 The desert lifts a full moon from the east
 And issues a dry Santa Ana breeze,
 And valets at chic restaurants will soon
 Be tending flocks of cars and SUVs.

And as the neighborhoods sink into dusk
 The fan palms scattered all across town stand
 More calmly prominent, and this place seems
 A vast oasis in the Holy Land.
 This house might be a caravansary,
 The tree a kind of cordial fountainhead
 Of welcome, looped and decked with necklaces
 And ceintures of green, yellow, blue, and red.

Some wonder if the star of Bethlehem
 Occurred when Jupiter and Saturn crossed;
 It's comforting to look up from this roof
 And feel that, while all changes, nothing's lost,
 To recollect that in antiquity
 The winter solstice fell in Capricorn
 And that, in the Orion Nebula,
 From swirling gas, new stars are being born.

- Timothy Steele



It's Not Hypothetical Anymore...

The graduate students who have finished their practicum class would like us to know that it was a positive experience. Although some started their first day nauseated and panic-stricken, they got through it and learned a few things.

- ◆ It is a wonderful and rejuvenating experience to actually get started working with people.
- ◆ Your supervisor is there to help—ask this person as many questions as you can.
- ◆ Your practicum professor is similarly helpful. Practicum class can be fun.
- ◆ You will make mistakes. You are supposed to make mistakes. This is a learning experience.
- ◆ Everything will be all right.



Working Together

We shape our self
to fit this world

and by the world
are shaped again.

The visible
and the invisible

working together
in common cause,

to produce
the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way
the intangible air

passed at speed
round a shaped wing

easily
holds our weight.

So may we, in this life
trust

to those elements
we have yet to see

or imagine,
and look for the true

shape of our own self,
by forming it well

to the great
intangibles about us.

— David Whyte



I WROTE MY GRATITUDE LIST, YET I STILL
DON'T FEEL BETTER.

It is time to order books for Spring! The following are required:

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| Coun 615: | Counseling the Culturally Diverse, 5th Ed., Sue |
| Coun 620: | Counseling Children and Adolescents, 4th Ed., Vernon |
| Coun 625: | The Life Span: Human Development for Helping Professionals, 3rd Ed., Broderick |
| Coun 630: | Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy, 8th Ed., Corey |
| Coun 633: | Crisis Intervention Strategies, 6th Ed., James |
| Coun 665: | Solution Focused Counseling in Schools, 2nd Ed., Murphy |
| Coun 667: | DSM IV, 4th Ed., APA (The complete manual, not the small version) |
| | Selecting Effective Treatments, 4th Ed., Seligman |
| Coun 687: | ACA Ethical Standards Casebook, 6th Ed., Herlihy |



“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson



*Happy
Holidays*