



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

An attitude of gratitude

What if you woke up tomorrow with only the blessings you gave thanks for today?

This question was posed on Facebook by a former roommate of mine, and it really got me thinking. Like many people, I tend to think of blessings on a general scale, citing ones commonly named: family, friends, good health, a roof over my head. But imagine how long my list and yours would grow if the slate could be wiped clean tomorrow.

Things we take for granted—eyes to see, legs to run, ears to hear, hands to feel—would suddenly seem paramount if we thought we'd lose them. I suspect we'd rack our brains to make sure we left nothing out.

And it is this attitude—an appreciation for fine details that make our lives better, easier or more beautiful—that I believe leads to fulfillment. In fact, when I look at people who seem genuinely happy, accepting of whatever cards they've been dealt, I notice a distinct ability to see the silver lining. Regardless of their situation, they understand there's always someone worse off. They compare themselves to those who have less, not more, thus realizing how fortunate they are.

As I think about gratitude and how healing it is to be specific, I'm reminded of an article I read in which Maya Angelou recounted a dark period early in her career. Severely depressed, she went to see her mentor and told him she was going crazy.

"Here is a yellow notepad and a ballpoint pen," he said. "Write down your blessings."

"I don't want to talk about that," she replied. "I'm telling you I'm going crazy."

Her mentor replied, "Think of the

millions of people who cannot hear a choir, or a symphony, or their own babies crying. Write down, *I can hear - Thank God*. Write down that you can see this yellow notepad, and think of all the millions of people who cannot see a waterfall, or a flower blooming, or their lover's face. Write down, *I can see - Thank God*."

As Maya filled the pad with blessings, she realized how much she had. That was more than 50 years ago, and since then she's written every book, poem and speech on yellow notepads, saying, "As I approach the clean page, I think of how blessed I am."

As you count your blessings this Thanksgiving season, go beyond the obvious. Imagine things you couldn't fathom losing tomorrow, and write them down.

If you're really ambitious, follow Maya Angelou's lead and compile a list on a yellow notepad. I have no doubt that, given enough time and thought, any of us could fill an entire pad—perhaps even two or three.

As for me, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, my readers. You are a tremendous blessing to me. I'm grateful for everyone who takes the time to read my column, stops me to say they enjoyed a particular piece or encourages me to keep writing. Thank you for sharing your stories and inspiring me to share mine. We're all in this world together, figuring life out one blessing at a time.

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