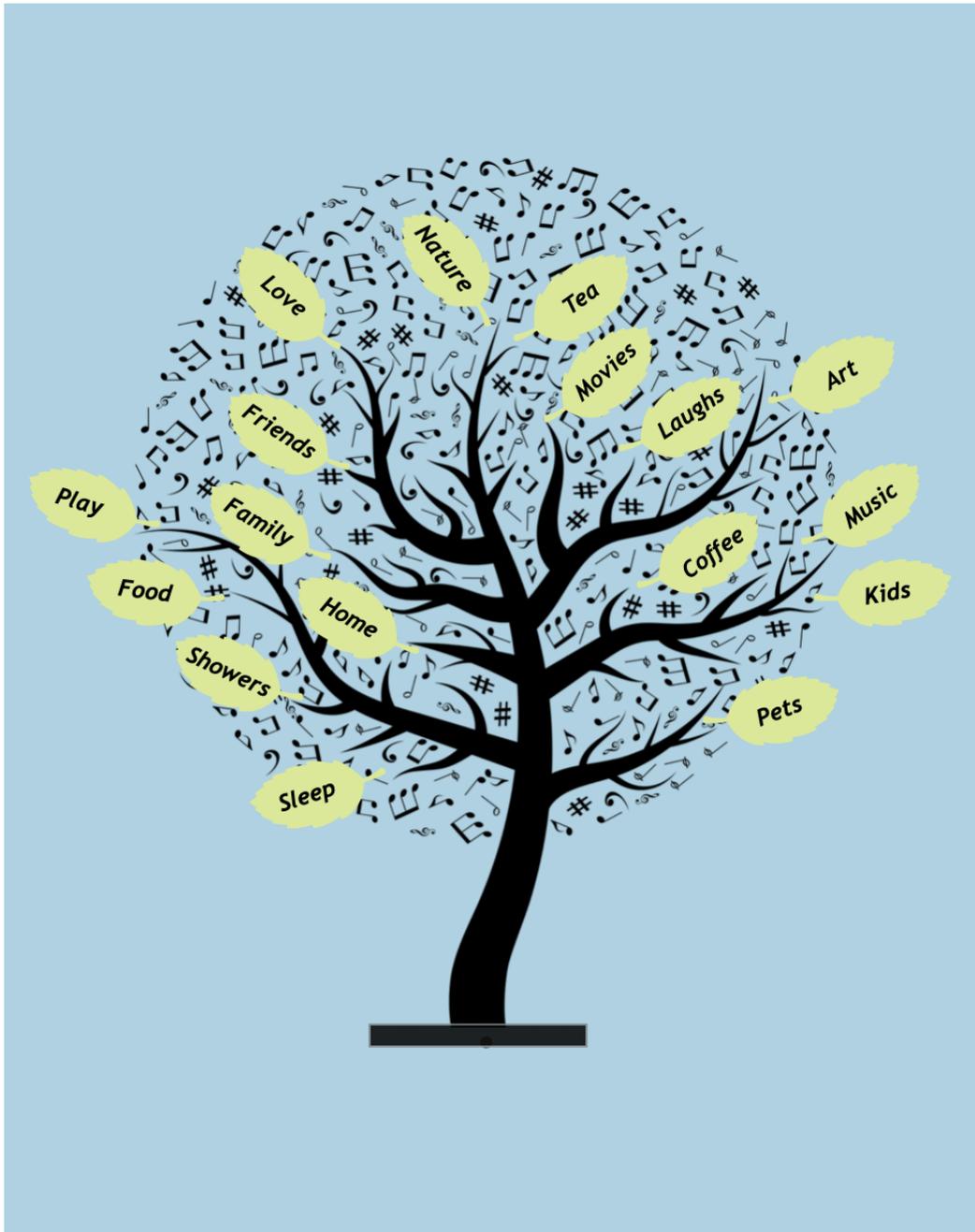


AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Inspiring happiness through thankfulness



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*Happiness is not a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought,
a state of mind. ~ Daphne du Maurier*

Happiness

Happiness - We all want to feel more of it and at times it is so hard to feel any at all. When the moment or entire day has been rough, how do we inspire our own happiness? If we struggle to find happiness ourselves, how can we help our loved ones, neighbors, strangers and the world to feel more happiness too?

The idea that happiness is something that we can inspire and cultivate for ourselves and others, that it does not just happen for one and disregard another, was first introduced to me in my early twenties. I was experiencing the stress of a graduate program in Traditional Chinese Medicine, the death of my father and the loss of an 8 year relationship. I found very little relief for the emotional stress and happiness was very hard to come by. This led me to do much inner work and discovery, by taking courses, reading and opening my heart and mind.

During this time I came across a quote that inspired me and has remained a favorite of mine ever since. It was written by author, Daphne du Maurier and it reminds us "Happiness is not a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought, a state of mind."

So, if this idea has merit, how do we go about cultivating a mind of happiness? Could it be a practice of gratitude?

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Better to light one small candle, than to curse the darkness

~Chinese Proverb

Gratitude increases happiness

What does gratitude mean to you? Is it an expression of appreciation for what one has, a recognition of value or worth? Does it generate feelings of goodness and warmth and strengthen personal connections? Is it only felt when those things we have and feelings we share are positive, or is it also possible we are grateful for things we find challenging or uncomfortable?

Dr. Robert A. Emmons and Dr. Michael E. McCullough have done a lot of research on gratitude. They have found gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with higher levels of happiness, more positive emotions, improved health, stronger relationships and an increased ability to handle adversity.

In my experience, a practice of gratitude works! I have seen great outcomes in people I know who have developed a personal practice. My own journaling began in my twenties and has opened my heart and mind to being thankful, even for the challenging moments. As a Chinese Proverb says, "Better to light one small candle, than to curse the darkness," I found by training my brain toward gratitude, a tough day could end in reflection. Such as: "Was there a lesson I would not have learned otherwise?" "Did this tough experience or day help me gain an insight to better understand myself or another person?"

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*It is not happiness that makes us grateful, it is gratefulness
that makes us happy ~ David Steindl-Rast*

Grateful Living

Brother David Steindl-Rast talks about adopting an experience of grateful living by realizing every moment is a given opportunity, a gift, you haven't earned it or brought it about in any way. You have no way of ensuring another moment will be given to you and without opportunity, we cannot experience. We will not be grateful or happy about everything, like war, violence, oppression, loss of life. Yet we can be grateful for every opportunity.

Taking the time to stop and reflect on our experience allows us to live life fully, inspire, grow and change. Perhaps we change the most from challenging experiences. The practice of stopping and observing gratitude daily allows us the chance to see the clear gifts and the gifts that also come from our challenges. Like our infant selves trying to learn to walk. If we did not try and fall and hurt, we would never have learned to walk. The experience of failing, falling, didn't stop us from trying; we eventually learned and looking back at it, we are grateful we tried.

Writing your daily gratitude can be fun and reflective. Here are some helpful tips to getting started. Join me in expanding your happiness through gratitude.

*Opportunities to find deeper powers within ourselves
come when life seems most challenging. ~ Joseph Campbell*

Create Space for Gratitude

Create a calm space to schedule your time. Maybe that is in your garden, on your bed before turning in, or upon waking, on the couch, somewhere along your hiking trail. Make it cozy, comfortable and quiet, pets cuddling on your lap are likely cozy so welcome them along and add them to your list. You might consider playing some relaxing music, light a candle, whatever makes it a nice ritual for you. It is also okay to not have a ritual and just get it done, by not making it too much of a fuss you may be more successful.

Journaling Your Gratitude

Write in a store bought journal, or one you create like a craft project with gluing, pasting, stickers, photos. Type it out on your computer, paint the words and images on an art canvas, or write it on your driveway or sidewalk with chalk.

The process is simple but may not be easy at first. You can write out "I am grateful for..." each time or just write down the words and phrases. Pick a number, I recommend 5 to start, and get to writing down those things you are thankful for. If you need to borrow ideas from others, do so, that's a great place to start giving you ideas, I left you my list from today at the end of this blog. If you are struggling to come up with 5, ask a loved one for help.

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I awake each day with a grateful heart

You might find some answers by asking yourself questions. What do I like about myself? My eyes, My hair, My sense of humor, My intelligence, My big heart, Being a parent, Being a friend.

What are some times I felt most happy today? Most supported? Most successful?

What are some pleasant things I heard today? Sounds? Videos? Music? Nature?

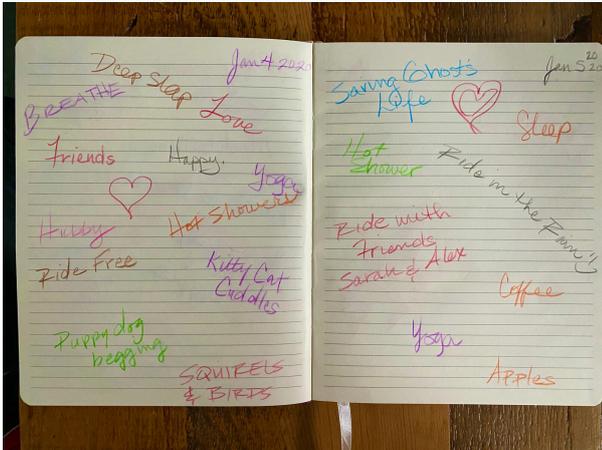
Sometimes it is helpful to just write down everything that comes to mind, wherever your mind wanders, write it down. A few days into this simple commitment of a few minutes (or all day), you will feel the words flow more easily onto your chosen medium of gratitude.

On the following page you will see a few of the gratitude journals I have. I hope this will give you a place to start. You will be able to find a variety of journals made for gratitude journaling at a local bookstore and of course on Amazon. If you are looking for a blank journal, you might check school supply aisles at your grocery or drugstore. You can find colored pencils, markers and stickers there if you'd like to liven up your journal.

To create your own computer based Gratitude book (like the third example I have shown you below), here are links for a [Windows computer](#) and a [Mac computer](#).

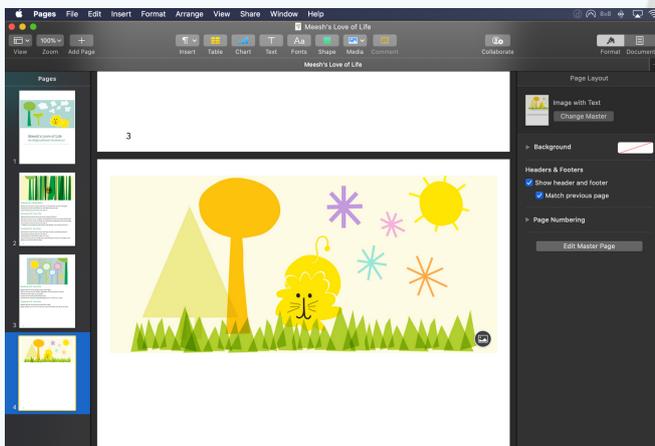
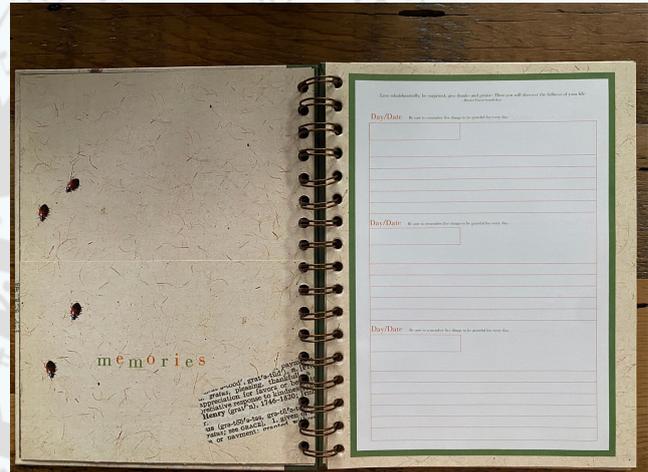
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TODAY, I AM GRATEFUL FOR...



My Colored Pencil Journal - In this I select a color and write a word or phrase, then lay that color down, pause, select a new color and write a word or phrase. I repeat this until my mind runs quiet.

My Store Bought Journal - A template for gratitude. This has a few pages with a pocket for memories and just enough lines to keep the time brief. I use this one by my bed, more as a tool to write 5 things I was grateful for today, before going to sleep.



Computer Journal Book - This is a program in "Pages," on Mac, that allows you to create a book. I use this when I have more to say about my day, like a journal of experiences and gratitude for the day

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Today, I am thankful for...

- ~ A very refreshing night of sleep
- ~ Waking up to a new day
- ~ The blessing of another day with my family
- ~ Feeling of the sun on my body
- ~ Clouds today, providing small pauses from the sun
- ~ The refreshment of the breeze on my face
- ~ The sun staying up longer
- ~ My house, my work, my bike, my slippers
- ~ The health to live life each day to my full potential
- ~ Delicious and nutritious food
- ~ Treating myself sometimes
- ~ Space and time to nurture myself
- ~ Moving my body in nature
- ~ Feeling stress in my body as a reminder
- ~ Taking a deep breath to ease my tension
- ~ Heros putting their heart into helping the sick
- ~ Teachers, mentors and coaches
- ~ My cat, Ghost and my dog, Apple
- ~ My husband, Rich
- ~ You...

Thank you for taking the time to join me. I hope you will join me again soon. Until then - May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free of all dis-ease and feel peace.

**Together In health,
Michelle**

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