

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Mission Center,

As you go through this letter, you'll be reading the last of numerous drafts, not because I couldn't think of anything to share, but rather because there is so much that could be addressed. It's been a divisive political time with disturbing headlines in our country, our world and it seems even nature and fellow humans are at odds in an increasingly messy co-existence.

So, you're welcome...I chose not to cover any of that this time. But, within November is my favorite holiday-Thanksgiving. For many people, Thanksgiving is stressful when too much togetherness and disregard for taboo topics leads to discord, where you tip toe around that one family member that can flip the mood at any given moment. But, that was rarely my story. I always have loved the time with my family wherever we landed or if they landed at my house. Oh, the foods we consumed, the mingling aromas of sweet and savory, the anticipated respite with football, movies, or games as we grazed through leftovers, laughed out loud or merely smiled at the stories that became family lore and connected us. And, I'm confident sour cream raisin pie is a religious experience when consumed during Thanksgiving.

But one Thanksgiving in 1997 was particularly painful. That fall was a busy one as Brian and I were both working with two small children. I was in the final credits of my Master's Degree commuting to Ft. Leavenworth, so had come to truly appreciate the gift of an intergenerational home as Mom had decided to stay with us after Dad's death a few years earlier. In October, she abruptly became ill and rapidly declined. I struggled to communicate her condition to my brother and sister, each in distant states. Their task was to gauge their family, work and travel plans to be with Mom, but not create a hardship in their own homes as it became evident she would not recover. I made the final calls to come quickly to say their goodbyes, and they did. As gospel music quietly played in the room, we sat vigil at her bedside, whispering our love, and in the wee hours of that Thanksgiving she left us.

I feared her death would redefine all the Thanksgivings to follow...and it did, but not as I imagined. Grief is a prickly emotion, and I mourn her still, but for this holiday, this and every year, I choose to be abundantly thankful and acknowledge the many blessings that surround me, as she would want. A grateful heart is mine, one that celebrates her and still whispers love for Mom. I remember her, acknowledging the influence she has on my life and, through me, has on the lives of others. I have a choice in how I respond to what life deals me. I'm choosing gratitude.



We often give in to the negative voices that bombard us, take the bait to join a criticism, or argue the evidence of a half empty glass. But, this Thanksgiving, I'd challenge you to set aside those temptations and choose to embrace the good that is seeking to be noticed by you.

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. " Colossians 3:16-17 (NRSV)

Giving thanks with a grateful heart,
Sara