



A grateful heart

Kate Chadbourne

To my mother, with love and a grateful heart

Preface

Feeling grateful = Feeling good.

Thinking good thoughts = Feeling good.

Praising and admiring = Feeling good.

It's that simple.

That's all this little book is about, really. It's a chance to dwell on the immense goodness of our lives and in so doing, to feel wonderful.

My dear friend, Trisha Knudsen, a gifted poet and wordsmith, challenged me to share three positive thoughts for five days running on – you guessed it, Facebook! Along with hundreds and probably thousands of others, I wrote a daily post about what I love, what amazes me, what inspires me to bow in gratitude.

I found myself thinking about these posts hours later and dreaming them up hours before it was time to rise and return to the on-line coffee shop that is Facebook and write the next day's list.

It was tempting to finish the task quickly: my car, running water, family and friends. And yes, I am grateful for those things and so much else (everything from spare toilet paper in the cupboard to the music of Paul Winter).

But something urged me to take a little more time. As I did, themes emerged. I saw a larger arc than I'd expected. I felt joyful. Amused. Delighted. Awe-struck. And truly, deeply grateful.

I hesitated to share them with you. After all, you have your own list and why should you wish to read mine? Then I realized that I'd like to read yours. I'd like to read everyone's!

As they say: *A shared joy is a doubled joy.*

So I offer my list in the spirit of feeling good by sharing the joy of a grateful heart. One star among many in a glorious, star-filled sky!

With love,

Kate Chadbourne

September 2014

Day One: The Knowings

Knowing we can start again.

The power, in any moment, to say: “This is a fresh start. The past is past. Now is a sparkling gift of possibility and hope. I’m new in this moment, too.”

Life opens its doors again when we remember that.

Knowing we can, at any moment, change our attitude.

My mother taught me this one. Catching me in a pubescent snarl, she'd send me upstairs with this counsel: "Go change your attitude."

Sure enough, I'd go upstairs and pout for a while, but eventually I'd think, "Is this how I want to feel?" Invariably, the answer was no.

I learned that I could drop the cloak of doom and come back downstairs refreshed and ready to be a person again.

What a powerful lesson she taught me. Thanks, Mama.

Knowing that the gift of life itself is a tremendous honor.

I mean that literally: it's a great honor to be alive.

To be here in this time and place, to inhabit a body, to possess senses with which to perceive and love the world (the hummingbirds flitting fairylike to the feeder and the warm wind blowing the August leaves into a dance, for instance)... I mean, what are the chances?

Could there be any greater gift than this?

And knowing that, recognizing that gift: The Queen of the Blessings.

Bonus joy

Knowing that there is always a way to make this moment even more delightful.

For me on this last day of August, that meant putting on the kettle for a second cup of tea – because writing about my gratitude with a cup of peppermint chocolate tea at the ready makes *me* feel like the Queen of the Blessings. Oh, yes.

Day Two: The People

Neurodiversity.

This is a word for a concept I truly love: different brains which generate different desires, gifts, talents, and inclinations.

I'm grateful to live in a world of infinitely different thinkers. If we all lived in a world presided over by Kate's brain, we could kiss goodbye air travel and dishwashers, much less quadratic equations. (On the other hand, there **would** be more fairies).

We need everyone.

This morning, The Writer's Almanac told about the man who invented cable cars in San Francisco. He watched as a team of horses trying to pull a heavy load uphill was overpowered by the wagon's weight and dragged backwards downhill to their deaths. He saw the need for a new method of transport and set right to work – and the iconic San Francisco cable cars were born!

I love a mind like this, just as I love the mind that thought up pesto and the mind that invented the national parks system.

I love a mind that prioritizes kindness.

I love a mind that wants to feed people or that knows the best route to the beach.

I am grateful for our differences which make the world much better and a whole lot more interesting than it would be if we were all the same.

People who are brave enough to give their gifts to the world.

We all have strikes against us and it's easy to tell the story of those strikes and leave it there.

“I can't X because Y and Z happened to me as a child/last week/when I tried...”

Those *are* challenges, yes, and deserve our compassion. But the illusion is thinking that we are alone in being challenged or handicapped. We aren't.

The other illusion is thinking that other people possess some singular advantage that makes it easy for them to share their gifts. They don't.

I bow in gratitude and admiration for people who sneak around, under, over, or even through those illusions (powerful as they are), people who put desire and hope first and just get down to work.

They inspire me more than I can say.

The Teachers.

People who help us become more compassionate, more skillful, more warmly human.

Some of them work in schools, but a great majority of them are all around us wherever we go.

That person who turned a potentially awkward moment into laughter? A Teacher.

The one who showed me how to be a better friend? Another Teacher.

People who do the right thing, the elegant thing, the kind thing, the beautiful thing? Teachers, all.

I couldn't begin to count or name the Teachers in my life. But I am grateful to all of them, past, present, and future.

Bonus joy

Workers everywhere.

People who create the world, set it in motion, and keep it running. Bless you all!

Day Three: The Animals

Animal Friendship.

I will never get my fill of videos showing the companionship of Joe the Elephant with Teddy the Llama, or Jane the Rabbit and Esmerelda the Iguana.

Are they bothered by the fact that one has scales and the other sports feathers? Not a whit. And their different languages cause no problem, either. They simply like each other and get down to the business of having a good time.

And blessedly, they are easy-going enough to offer us the same warmth.

Am I inconsiderate, a slob, a bore, an Eeyore, or a rake? Still, the cat loves me or the dog worships me.

We could learn a thing or two about acceptance, loyalty, and love from this crowd.

Animal Humor.

Some scientists love to say that what differentiates us from the other animals (read: makes us superior enough to treat them any old way we deem fit) is the capacity for humor.

Well, obviously these people have not been watching enough YouTube videos of cats.

Nor have they played with enough puppies who, once they've hit on a good strategy for making you laugh, do it again and again until you are wheezing and teary.

My cat, Mish, makes me laugh – deliberately, I am certain – every single day. And his brand of humor includes not just classic pratfalls and banana-peel-type gags, but innuendo, sarcasm, and feline wit.

I'm sometimes challenged to keep up.

Our Animal Nature.

The parts of ourselves we try so assiduously to clothe, to conceal, to control are so often what actually make us lovable, wise, and worthy.

More and more, I value our wildness, instinct, intuition, fierceness, tenderness, hunger, pleasure, and native songs.

Of course, it's not all daisies. All of this comes packaged with territoriality, exclusion, and aggression.

But the other side of those qualities, the side that we can embody with courage and consciousness, is protection of home and family, marking of boundaries, and strength.

It's all here in our fur and feathers.

Here, too, we can take a leaf out of the animals' book and learn to use this innate power with care – but also with celebration and thanks!

Bonus joy

Animal by-products.

Cleaning out a cat box keeps you, shall we say, “close to the earth.”

On a humid day, smelling cat pee that is eternally and irrevocably woven into every fiber of your living room rug keeps you humble and aware of the essentials.

In-put, out-put.

Life in a body.

Uh-huh.

That’s what I’m talkin’ about.

Day Four: Habits of Mind

Practice.

My refuge, my home, my classroom.

Reassures me I'm alive and there is hope.

Absolutely necessary to my composure and joy.

(By the way, I practice piano, writing, and harp, but one can practice anything. Perhaps we could all try patience by way of getting started?)

Curiosity.

Things hook my attention – quirky, generally useless things in the sense that no one will profit from them financially, but wonderful, important things in the sense that they ring with aliveness to me, at least.

Oh, the pleasure in pursuing my questions and whims through a sea of books and words, notions, hypotheses, re-thinking, connecting of dots...

The Benefit of the Doubt.

What a life saver.

What a time saver!

Giving other people the benefit of the doubt.

Giving myself the benefit of the doubt (harder still).

Letting things alone and declining to pick up the heavy bag of judgment.

Worth practicing.

Bonus joy

Writing by Hand.

Yes, I know this one lumps me with the dinosaurs, but I just love it.

Journaling, list-making, doodling, scratching ideas and outlines, and heaven knows: poem-making!

For me, Hand connects directly to Heart and Head.

Plus: ink, paper, blank books, and fountain pens!

Day Five: The Numinous & Us

Cycles and Seasons.

I'm grateful for the rising of sun and moon, the changing tides, the rounding of summer into fall into winter into spring.

I'm grateful for the small circles of days and months and the larger circles of years and decades and centuries.

I'm grateful that things begin and grow and decline and end (and something new begins).

There are challenges here, yes: of letting go, of accepting change, of trust.

And there are gifts: of refreshment, of delight, of wonder.

Look around and you'll notice some people strenuously resisting cycles and seasons – which is just another way of naming change and time – through complaints and pretense; this is all of us sometimes, and it's a lot of work.

Wise ones, though, get in tune with the music of what's happening. They see clearly the season they're living and they embrace every bit of it; this is also all of us sometimes.

I think of my dear friend Miss Helen Finn moving from her beautiful house on the Saco River into an assisted living home. She saw it was time and made the move.

I asked her a few weeks later how she was getting on. “Mostly, Katie, I’m just lost in my own amazement,” she said.

Then, with palpable delight, she told me about reuniting with her great friend Barbara who had taught with her in the one-room schoolhouse many decades ago. Two friends, brought back together after so long: a gift from the new season in her life.

Miss Finn is one of my most cherished teachers in the art of flowing with time.

The beauty of a perfect September apple helps us to let go of the faded summer.

There is wisdom in surrendering to the beauty that waits for us in the new season.

I’m grateful for the opportunity to practice this.

Grace.

To my mind, Grace is Skill infused with Soul.

Often, a sudden awareness of light alerts us to its presence. It can be a luminous act, a radiant gesture, a moment aglow in its own integrity.

We are not solely responsible for Grace, and I'm not sure that we can produce it deliberately.

Sometimes it is the result of care and practice, investments of time and love.

Sometimes it flashes into us without warning or foreknowledge.

But we recognize it by the way it makes us feel and that is enough.

We witness it in nature: the red-tailed hawk leaping from a steeple, the apple tree shining with a full freight of fruit.

We witness it in each other: the stellar athlete sailing skyward, the baker effortlessly pulling golden loaves from the oven.

It is with us every day, in every place. It embodies integrity, faith, beauty, and the holy marriage of our world with the divine.

Grace is a generous virtue because even simply by witnessing it, we are transformed.

Grace changes everyone and everything it touches.

The Soul.

Essence.

The Beauty that lies at the heart of all things.

I weep, writing those words.

I bow to that Essence in this world I love with all my heart. I bow to that Essence in you, dear friend. And I bow to that Essence in myself. This is the great spirit that unites us in all times and places, forever.

I remember long ago talking with my mother about what lay at the heart of life: joy or sorrow. I claimed it was joy and she – the most deeply compassionate person I know and a nurse for some fifty years – could not agree; she'd seen too much heartache in the hospital.

Of course, as about so much else, she was right.

Now I understand that I framed the whole question wrong. The truth is, both joy and sorrow lie at the heart of life. Of course they do. How could they not?

But what holds these both in powerful and balancing embrace is Love.

The world is made of Love. You are made of Love. I am, too.

When we witness the Soul, what we are witnessing is Love.

Our practice, our joy, and our devotion is to develop eyes that see and hearts that recognize the Soul with its signature qualities of Essence, Beauty, and Love – and then to adore it!

Bonus joy

You & Me. Here Together.

I am gobsmacked with gratitude for my beloved family and friends.

Here we are, riding on Planet Earth together.

This is our turn to make history simply by living our lives, following our noses and yes, our bliss.
Aren't we lucky?

I am grateful for your company, your grace, your magnificence, and the beauty of your Soul.

I love you!

Keep it going.

Thank you for reading this.

Now, let me encourage you: Make up a positivity or gratitude challenge on your own terms.

Write it down if you are so inclined. Speak it aloud if that's more your cup of tea.

Five days, one day, ten days, forever. One thing, three things, a thousand things: your choice.

But however you do it, I hope you will simmer in the sauce of gratitude, pleasure, appreciation, and positivity because it feels good.

And I also hope you will share the love with the rest of us because that makes EVERYTHING better!

You could start right now, if you like, by completing this sentence:

I really love...

About Kate Chadbourne.



I believe that when we sing, tell stories, craft poetry, make music, art, jokes, light in the darkness – we create a world of warmth, connection, meaning, joy, and hope.

With all my heart, I love helping to create that world.

I joyfully do my part by singing, playing harp and piano, making poems, telling stories, teaching, writing, performing, recording, and offering welcome, festivity, and a touch of enchantment.

If you'd like to learn more about my music and performances, please visit www.katechadbourne.com. You can also read my blog which explores creativity, learning, and tradition.

For information about my Bardic Academy, my private arts school for musicians, singers, writers, and creatives of all stripes, please visit www.bardicacademy.com.