

Thankful for Being Able to Be Grateful for Gratitude

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 29 November 2013 18:21

Yesterday was the official day of handing out our thanks to anyone who would listen. With luck, we not only thought about doing that, but actually did so. Out loud. And, with even more luck, we also had some takers, in between thunderclaps of footballer collisions from our Big Screen teevees, and the assorted sonic booms of industry and inventiveness erupting from kitchen and guests.

You might have even been so lucky as to have been heard above the acoustic carnage of the day, and, luckier still, to have received knowing, thoughtful, insightful, and sincere replies along the same lines.

I mean, I can wish that such becalmed seas ferried you along softly and sweetly yesterday, and in the golden photographer's light of dawn or dusk, all the while sipping a profoundly satisfying adult entertainment beverage, but the odds are pretty much against it, I'd imagine -- like hoping Aunt Smelda would *please, please* forget to bring over her famous Jell-O mold, with odd bits of things suspended in the gelatin (some identifiable and mostly edible, others of a baffling, mysterious origin) like a forgetful, absent-minded cook's version of bugs trapped in amber.

You know, for my money, you just can't get too much cosmic serenity. So, I hope you were able to find some quiet moments of grateful reflection, there among the ringing of our ears by our ritual televised mania, and amid the jumbled chaos of that Short Attention Span Theatre created when way too much happens all at once in a small, confined space, and with at least 50 percent more people on hand than we really have chairs for.

Amid all the noise and haste, and all the joys and waste of our Food Fight of a holiday, here's hoping you were able to find some opportunities to go placidly through the day, rather than mandatorily scissoring through it on a jagged adrenalin wave, on Maximum Jangled setting, scampering and sprinting as if beset by rabid timber wolves, your still-smoldering, blast-scorched hair describing the state of the day, as though you'd had an earlier, accidental encounter between your fingers and a wall outlet or two.

Barring that sort of cool, aloof, pleasantly detached, Art Deco feeling of a Maxfield Parrish original, I can only hope that today you've been able to dodge the starter's pistol for Black Friday shopping -- especially as an increasing number of shoppers are arming themselves to the teeth, and no longer above firing a few warning shots into your thigh, should you inch too

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closely, through the crowded throng, toward the last Doorbuster Special, combination fresh pasta maker, spark plug wrench, and home tattoo kit -- *Now!* *With complimentary hand mirror!*

No matter what Gratitude does, I have it on good authority that Hope will go right on, springing eternal, and Desire will go right on wanting and scheming. Probably, *springing eternal* is in Hope's job description, and hasn't got a lot of leeway in that whole line. As far as Desire's concerned, I have no idea what's on its mind, nor do I want to know -- which in itself, may well be a breakthrough moment of some sort.

I have the vague sense that all these things are somehow related to a very old joke, which goes like this:

Person 1: What's the difference between ignorance and apathy?

Person 2: (Irritated) I don't know, and I don't care!

Person 1: *That's right!*

* * * * *

Personally, I'm grateful to be temporarily beyond the icicle grasp of cancer, and momentarily beyond cancer's frosty reach. This is second only to my enduring, unshakable bedrock thankfulness that no Republican sat around my dining table yesterday.

I did not have to break out Thom Hartmann's long-suggested, Thanksgiving Day guidelines on asking Republicans what the GOP has ever done for regular people -- and so, I had no one hearing that question, earnestly thinking about it, and then having a human head explode in my household. Just as well. We're low on drop cloths and furniture covers.

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However, I understand many people were not so fortunate, and hosted members of the Barbarian Hordes. Personally speaking, now, if there's not an outright cure for such things by now, then, as a civilized society, we should have a couple of foundations looking into the spread of Republicanism. I mean, we'd do something similar in any sudden growth spurt and outcropping of zombies. Same thing here, I mean.

And, in a burst of excellent timing, there are probably any number of fully-capable, full-scale research facilities -- still idle since forced abandonment during the Dubya years -- that would be tearfully ecstatic, and more than properly grateful, at the prospect of a few block grants coming in for landing, like homing pigeons detoured on an extensive bender, but, through loving intervention, have sobered up and, like the swallows returning to San Juan Capistrano, have found their way home again.

(Hey, if corporations can be people, after all, then research facilities can gratefully shed a tear or three when the need or desire arises. Which reminds me of another key point -- one I was thinking about using in another piece I was thinking about, about representative government in general, and about Republican and Blue-Dog representatives in particular -- where Spock periodically reminded Kirk, even in re-runs, that *wanting* and *having* were two entirely different things. Anyone who's been through the latest GOP temper tantrums -- or the psychological hand-to-hand combat of a family reunion Thanksgiving -- is already crystal clear on this stuff.)

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I'm also grateful for the continuing health and good humor of family and friends, and for their recovery of same, whenever they accidentally dropped them. Maintaining a good grip of such things has never been easy, but, since the odometer on the Mesoamerican calendar rolled over to 2000, it's been a really sharp challenge to maintain a grip on basic sanity as well.

Craziness, I have always said, is its own reward. However, I started saying that long, long before the Tea Party, rightwing-nut media, and fact-free, fantasy newscasts, and openly-psychotic, GOP office contenders all came along.

Now that Crazy has upped and gone pro, looks like I have some revising to do: *Craziness is its own entertainment.*

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Hmmm. No, not quite it. Maybe this, instead:

Craziness is its own awards dinner.

You know, working on the angle of

just desserts

, and so on.

Yeah, maybe not. I'll have to get back to you on that one.

* * * * *

Seriously, though, I'm thankful for the ability to be grateful on the whole gratitude thing. I'm not sure if this is a parental program installation or one I developed and installed in my own home study course, in my spare time. Maybe both. *Probably* both -- the program runs, but it's buggy.

(As you can see, this is an evolving programming science, or art form, this *being filled with thanks*

business. Like most Americans, it hardly ever makes it onto the To Do List, except when prompted by the calendar. Or deep and troubling misfortune.

Then again, I'm just happy as hell that I don't tend to celebrate national holidays the way some of my neighbors do, living sort of out in the country as we do. Yesterday, for example, was treated exactly like every other holiday by my neighbors: All day long, there was the sound of gunfire -- about nine and a half boxes of ammo in all, I'd guess -- in single-round and semi-auto mode bursts. This was punctuated by window-rattling explosions from very loud, and very illegal, fireworks smuggled in from other states where the creation of smoldering, stadium-sized craters, and the loss of appendages, and hearing, is actively encouraged.

After an especially long and loud series of blasts, we would comment on the silent aftermath, wondering if the moron population in our area had been abruptly trimmed back a bit. Then, it would answer our question, and all start up again. It's enough to make you turn on, or turn up, the football game -- even if it is a basic celebration of colliding meat and stolen real estate, as the late, lamented George Carlin would sometimes remark -- usually to audiences wildly applauding the notion of such enjoyable, festive mayhem.

Of course, my standards are pretty high, I guess, when it comes to celebrating holidays:

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Somehow, I've come to believe that a degree of mellowness and relaxation is actually in order, and is preferable, to, say, going way out of my way to be a Royal Pain In The Ass and trying my best to whizz in everyone's Cheerios simply because I could.

But, then, come to think of it, I believe that Americans should celebrate Labor Day by diving into the history of the American Labor Movement, becoming acquainted with the sundry hells our forbears endured, and the incredible, amazing, breath-taking, landmark laws they forced into being, and all the subsequent benefits that flowed into all our homes and lives thereafter.

And, you know, while we're at it, I think Americans should spend Veteran's Day by watching a marathon of top-notch war movies, and the bloodier the better. This would give everyone a little bit better idea of the sacrifice veterans have made for them over the years, and help increase understanding a lot better than a gamut and glut of furniture sales tends to do.

In the spirit of Dave Barry, I have to say: Come to think of it, *Gamut and Glut* would be a pretty good name for a tavern, or, maybe,

Gut, Gamut, and Glut

. No, come to think of it, that's too much like a law firm. Probably, I'd go with my original name choice, if I were to open a tavern:

The Wince and Grimace

. I can almost see the old-fashioned, carved-wood plank sign, hanging out over the door on a wrought iron mount, for a place like that -- Republican-caused facial tick and all.

* * * * *

I'm grateful for other stuff, too. Although George W. Bush was a mixed bag -- *and here, I'd ask you to use your imaginations for what that bag might actually contain, and whether or not the bag was on fire, and, further, whether or not it involved children and the pressing of a neighborhood grouch's doorbell repeatedly*

-- he did give us a crashed economy, deficit spending on steroids, wars of corporate contrivance and convenience on the national credit card, terrorist attacks on American soil, the effective gutting of protective legislation, the near-collapse of global finance, the eviction of countless families from their homes, along with a free ride for the wealthy, and for banks, financiers, and oil companies...

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On the "up" side, though, he gave us a bevy of Bushisms -- concepts like being *misunderestimated*, or putting *food on your family*, or being the country where *wings take dream* all got to unexpectedly enter the language.

He scarcely had to ask if *our children is learning*, but he did. A divorced mother of three in Omaha was probably not buoyed to learn that her working three jobs was *fantastic* and *uniquely American*. And, at a fund raiser, Bush said that the people gathered there were those many usually call the elite, but he preferred calling them the *haves and have mores* ... and named them *his base*. You can't get entertainment like that on the cheap.

The country has never been so bushwhacked -- like it had spent a number of years chewing on bat-guano-crazy, hybrid-certified, high-octane loco weed. With tequila. And peyote. On top of a crate of heroin-and-meth cocktails. In a sippy cup. *Dirty, no bendy straw*.

* * * * *

There's other things I'm grateful for, like the Grateful Dead, who named themselves after.... well, you can pick your own best explanation there. (There are a few noted in a link below.) In any event, all music should evoke joy and thanks. (Yes, even the kind that makes me craziest, which, lately, involves the auto-tuning of talent-free screechers into the status of adored, highly-proclaimed, natural song artists.)

Then, there's The National Film Board of Canada, for example. We have nothing like it here, unless you want to call Hollywood an incubator for the arts versus a mill for the slavish manufacture of narrow-mindedness and paper wealth. There's probably a lot we could learn from other countries, come to think of it, if we weren't so darned busy being Number One -- so busy, in fact, that we never even noticed slipping to Number Thirty-nine.

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But, there's a lot of fine laughing to be done, and I am thankful for any thing that triggers that reflex seepage of endorphins and thus reduces stress levels in a snap.

I'm grateful for being able to notice when good things happen. This sounds simple, but isn't, not really. Like good health and good luck, when the trends and tables turn, it's very easy to notice the absences, suddenly. Maybe for the first time. Perhaps this is the nature of things: Loss and Change make you notice when things are going OK, and slowly encourages a sense of gratitude when your life is not actually on fire, buried beneath 16 tons of rubble, and finding breathing very difficult.

I'd like to think there's some generally, eventually positive, purpose for things going very badly wrong, when life starts using you as a crayon to color way outside the lines. But, then, we humans are pattern seekers, and, when not hounded by the urgencies of daily living, we will sometimes try to make sense of such things, and of life. It is for this main purpose that I think fire was created -- a hypnotic medium of reflection and inquiry.

That whole heat-and-cooked-food thing was pretty good, too. Too bad that, on the one hand, so few of us have access to open flames today. On the other hand, given the increasing numbers of our population, and the general dip in common sense and IQ and perceptive and empathetic cognition, I am pleased to report that fewer of us have access to large, open flames than ever before.

Instead, we have the hypnotic medium of teevee. I myself have stared at the back of the set while it was on, from time to time. I have taken that experience camping, and now use campfires for that purpose. Campfires, I am pretty sure, were primitive and prehistoric television sets. You changed the channel on them by getting a stick, and moving the reddish, orange-white coal-bed around until you got an another acceptable image. Then, you could go back to blank-stares again. Mouth-breathing and drooling, while your brain shuts down, was probably invented only later on. For a while there, we had to be mindful of saber-toothed rodents and somewhat alert.

At least, I don't think BarcaLoungers spontaneously evolved on their own. Not only that: With a name like La-Z-Boy beneath you, propping up your butt, you probably need don't need a whole lot of alertness to get you through that sit-session.

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Just the remote.

And a cold one. And a bag of frozen peas for the forehead. And, with whatever headache remedy was currently promising the fastest possible relief known to mankind after decades of extensive, specially-formulated design investigations and applications.

Or aspirin.

And a fireplace video. Or open flames, inside the shell of your old teevee -- once you fireproof the thing, and change the channel, by taking out the gold fish tank first.

Thom's Turkey-Day Letter:

<http://www.thomhartmann.com/forum/2010/11/thanksgiving-debate-ammo-what-have-republicans-ever-done-letter>

Desiderata: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desiderata>

Ambiance: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_Deco

Gallery: <http://maxfieldparrishonline.com/gallery.htm>

Gratitude 101: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/gratitude>

Masters' level: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_myths_about_gratitude

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Zen level: <http://zenhabits.net/why-living-a-life-of-gratitude-can-make-you-happy/>

Better living through research: <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/Labs/emmons/PWT/index.cfm?Section=4>

Cultivating gratitude: <http://cafegratitudela.com/about/>

Gratitude for dinner: <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-vegan-thanksgiving-20131129,0,7317072.story#axzz2m4TbiFJG>

Baked gratitude: <http://www.gratitudecafebakery.com/>

Yes, you *are* still in Kansas: <http://cafegratitudekc.com/>

Instant wisdom: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/gratitude.html> **-and-**
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/thank_you.html
-and-
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/desire.html>

Factoid Central: <http://message.snopes.com/showthread.php?t=3626>

"Politely laughing into your cupped hand" section:

Bushisms: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bushism> - **and-**
<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/misunderestimate-tops-list-notable-bushisms-article-1.389921> **-and-** <http://politicalhumor.ab>

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out.com/od/bushquotes/a/dumbbushquotes.htm
-and-
[hundreds of others](#)

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/blbushisms.htm>

Bonus Bush quote: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/georgewbu385338.html>

"Open laughing allowed" section:

Carlin salutes our national militaristic obsession with, and drive for, more violence: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRfhbEUkg7o>

Award-winning animation jewels from the National Film Board:

Constant cat: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtl1pWkHto0&feature=related>

Procrastinators unite! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvIhM_xVWvM

The Big One: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwZ1fsqmU08>

-and-

A bonus doc about the Universe: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hu64xbgprWY>