

## Focus on Gratitude: Essays written by participants of Maintaining Gratitude

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### [Always look for opportunities to be grateful.](#)

Throughout my life gratitude took a back seat, whether under the influence of alcohol/drugs or not....i was unable to practice gratitude as my thoughts were centered mostly on self-esteem issues, scrutinizing other peoples behaviors, to the point where i was truly unable to believe it was viable to explore gratitude as a possibility....negativity always trumped the day....as a result of practicing the 12 steps of recovery, accepting a power greater than myself, addressing the issues i previously discussed, i have come to realize i'd allowed myself to become my own worst enemy....as a result, gratitude, which once was so foreign, now has a place in my life....not only am i grateful for the good fortune in my life, i'm grateful i now have an awareness when my mind drifts into negativity, wants to control a situation, that i can now turn it around....i'm grateful i can accept others behaviors, knowing full well that i've acted the same....for every situation which occurs in my life, be it good or bad, there's always an opportunity to be grateful.....should i have difficulty finding it, i slow down, accept the fact i'm not the boss, and ask god for help....p.s. just to make you aware here, i dont believe it's possible to be grateful by flipping the switch....most importantly, an addict has no chance until he realizes he/she had just about everything wrong...it's a ground up process...my sponsor introduced me to gratitude by having me email him 3 'gratefults' every day....i didnt realize the value of this silly maneuver until much later in recovery....i was too busy learning how not to fight life.....my level of recovery today runs parallel to my level of gratitude.....when my recovery is good, gratitude falls in my lap.....

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### [Changing my Vocabulary](#)

Very often when thoughts get me down or I am challenged by "life events" I may go to the various tools I have learned how to use in recovery. The Serenity Prayer, meditation and slogans like these are very helpful.

- "This too shall pass"
- "One day at a time"
- "How Important is it"
- "Keep it simple"
- "Think"(is it T.ruthful H.onest I.ntuitive N,ecessary K.ind)
- "Change a thought change a feeling"

- Serenity Prayer and meditation

When I'm not feeling grateful, I write a Gratitude list (things I am grateful for in my life), I call a sponsor or another recovering person, read 12 step or other recovery daily readers on the challenge or subject I am dealing with – self-centered fear, shame, trust, faith, loss and grief. I go to a meeting or reach out to help. Go for a walk in the woods, fields beach (walking meditation) or just sit quietly clear my mind, say a prayer, breathe and meditate.

I often suggest to those who say "I am struggling with this or that..." I used to say similar things however, I have made a practice of telling myself reminding myself, "I no longer 'struggle'! I have taken that word out of my vocabulary and have replaced it with the word 'challenged.' I am 'challenged' by this life event. When I used to use the word "struggle" It is like I am a victim of circumstance and the effort is hard. When I am "challenged", my competitive nature takes over and I look forward to meet the life event head on. I am empowered by just the change of thoughts engendered by the change of words.

The word for 'Crisis' in Chinese has two character strokes one means "danger" and the other "opportunity". So, I encourage others to meet the danger according to recovery principles and life style AND to "look for the OPPORTUNITY" that this event may bring.

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### [The power of “Yet” keeps me grateful and active in recovery.](#)

My sobriety date is 1/11/2009, so this holiday season I am in my 59th month of sobriety. My first sponsor gave me an amazing gift: fear of this disease. She celebrated 9 years sober shortly after we started working together and she still went to daily meetings, still called her sponsor daily, still actively did step work and service, still prayed and meditated and did inventories. She told me that there are not a lot of people in the rooms with 6, 7, 8, or 9 years of sobriety because a lot of people go out during those years. She told me that MOST PEOPLE DON'T STAY RECOVERED and this instilled in me a very healthy fear of this disease. Seeing all the work she put into her program even after 9 years of sobriety gave me a solid role model for "recovery as a way of life." This was not something she did to get sober and then did something else. She continued to do all the things to stay sober that she had done to get sober.

So how does this relate to gratitude? Well, my fear of my disease and my awareness that relapse is always a possibility keeps me extraordinarily grateful for all the "yets" that recovery saved me from. I realize all the blessings I have in my life **today** that I could have lost at any point during my using career. I didn't lose my professional license. I didn't get incarcerated and lose my freedom. I didn't lose any bodily functions. I didn't lose my home with heat and food in it. I didn't lose my loved ones. I didn't lose my mind. And after all of these I could add YET. If I do not keep working a program, I will absolutely- without a doubt- suffer one or more- maybe all- of these tragedies. Knowing how lucky I am to have recovered when I did, makes me feel so incredibly relieved to not have had certain "yets." That's not to say that I didn't suffer my share of horrors and devastation. We all have. But there is always more I could lose if choose to keep digging deep into the hole of active addiction. I am so grateful to have been saved from more terror and destruction.

Fear of my disease, which is treatable but not curable, keeps me grateful for how blessed I am to be sober **today**. Knowledge of the "yets" keeps me grateful for all the beautiful aspects of my life that

are intact [today](#) as a result of being sober, despite my spiral into addiction and the years I spent dragging at my bottom. I have recovered one day at a time and my recovery has been progressive, just like my disease was progressive. No matter how hard it is to stay sober, staying sober is infinitely easier than getting sober. My sobriety is a gift and I don't want to give it back. I don't know if this gift will be given to me again if I throw it away. All I know is I have this gift [today](#) and it is the most precious thing I have. Therefore, I do [today](#) to stay sober what I did to get sober nearly five years ago: meetings, step work (I'm on the fourth step for the 4th time right now), service work (and now sponsoring other women), prayer, meditation, and fellowship. It's not easy, but I am grateful I get to do it [today](#). This recovery way of life is so much easier than my life was in active addiction. No matter what, I don't pick up, and my life is better every single day than it was the day before.

I am so grateful we are sharing this sober journey together because I could not do it alone.

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### [Discovering life after surviving suicide.](#)

My thoughts on gratitude: Six years ago on December 2, 2007 I took my life by overdosing on a sedative drug. My wife noticed that I was blue and called rescue and when I got to the hospital I was in cardiac arrest. They worked on me a while and decided to stop when a colleague and my boss in my new job walked by and asked them to try one more time. That time was the charm and I survived. Was I grateful for surviving? No, not at all. I was pissed. My thinking was so screwed up that I did not think my death would be a burden to my family or friends or former patients. I reasoned that I had accomplished all I had wanted to and that my son was grown and doing well on his own so it didn't matter.

How wrong I was. The news of my suicide devastated many friends, colleagues and especially my family. In the mental fog that lasted quite a while afterwards I agreed to go for treatment. I had little enthusiasm for this journey. I was told I would have to cook for groups up to 20, and that terrified me more than anything else! MPHP knew I had gone for treatment so when I finished 14 weeks later I signed up for monitoring. I will be forever grateful that I survived and finally got myself into recovery. My life has completely turned around.

So, whenever I feel that life is pooping on me, all I have to do is remember how I felt December 2, 2007. I never, ever want to go back there and by the grace of God I won't. I am grateful for all the support and help I have gotten from MPHP. Though past my 5 years of monitoring I have chosen to remain in the aftercare program. I need them now as much as before. Finally, 2½ years ago my daughter in law gave birth to my first grandchild. I only have to look at a picture of her and my heart fills with gratitude.

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### [Focus on good things and good folks.](#)

I need a simple and brief phrase that I can reflexively and immediately turn to when I need a quick fix. We all know the AA adage: *"Poor me, pour me"*. I have found this to summarize one of the truths that I can anchor to as I continue in my pursuit of sobriety. If I start to feel sorry for myself, and don't focus on my gratitude list, I could be in trouble. I have found that I need to continue to

tolerate the baloney in the world, and focus on the good things and the good folks I have as friends and loved ones.

I try to not think or speak of the negative people and things I've experienced in my life. I try to think of all the folks that love me, the worldly accomplishments I have made, and that I am pressing on toward becoming the man God wanted me to be.

There is a lot of "wreckage of the past" in my life, which I can do nothing about. If I think about this I get very remorseful at a visceral level. This pain serves no useful purpose in my recovery.

I had a very good friend who was always positive. Always smiling and speaking constructively whether we were playing music or working on an old piece of machinery or just around other folks. He's since gone to his reward, but his spirit and lesson remain in my consciousness. One of the tools I use to maintain my gratitude is to tell myself "act like Glen".

I would suggest to anyone struggling, that they make a list of everything positive in their life. You have achieved an advanced education, accomplished much in your profession, have many loving friends and family, are treating your alcoholism effectively, and are on the road to becoming whole. You have been saved from your disease so keep looking forward. And always be grateful that the loving arms of the MPHP embrace you. When the regulators and licensing and credentialing people are all lined up against you, you have a powerful colleague in Manchester.

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