

## IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

# Thanksgiving: Can we handle it?

It's hard to know what to write at Thanksgiving time, especially this year. How do we put into words the emotions we feel following the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? — the anthrax threat and deaths? We are weary of the details, but even though we are across the country, we share the agony of the thousands of families who lost loved ones, including the 15,000 children who lost a parent. We will never forget the expressions and sounds of sheer terror of the people running down the streets of New York, trying to escape the huge, suffocating clouds of smoke and debris enveloping them.

I imagine the only worse attack on a country, killing more civilians at one time, was when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan.

Now, everything in our lives seems to have more of an edge. The holidays, alone, bring our lives so much into focus that sometimes we would just like to sleep through them. Every stress, every disappointment, every sadness, every bad family relationship sneak into our our minds — unwelcome as they are. Part of the problem is that more families are divided by divorce, distance and the stresses of the day.

When I was a child, one grandmother lived with us, my other grandparents lived across the street and an aunt and uncle and cousins lived behind us. Every holiday for decades I spent with the same group of relatives at my grandmother's house across the street. Now I am celebrating the fact I've lived in the same house for nearly 13 years — the longest time I've lived in one place since I left home 43 years ago.

At least I've lived in Galesburg for 28 years (three different times) and within a 50 mile radius most of my life.

So what am I thankful for this year? Ah, let me count the ways. It's a blessing to be alive, in good health, have enough food and a roof over my head. My family and extended family are well. I'm grateful for a husband who loves and supports me whether I'm on my soap box or not, puts up with my driven personality, watches me laugh, cry and gnash my teeth over life's important and unimportant events. In short, he loves me for who I am, and who could ask for anything more? I'm grateful

for my children and grandchildren, who are alive and well, loving and attentive. It's not that we don't have our battles, but they are open, honest and short-lived.

Increasingly important are friends. It's hard to describe the value of a good friend — also someone who loves us for who we are, and even though we don't see them every day, we know they are there for us. We find out who our real friends are during our times of failure *and* success. True friends sincerely share in the joy of our successes and don't revel in the despair of our failures.

This year I think particularly of my father, who will be 94 in December and is very ill, a shadow of his former self, but can still see the humor and irony in life. He will, no doubt, not see another Thanksgiving. He taught me to ice skate, play golf, swim, love Dairy Queen ice cream cones, plant pole beans and eat grapes right off the vine.

When I was 15 he announced I had a job at the library for 25¢ an hour and it was time for me to go to work. He thought it was a good idea for me to volunteer to teach Sunday school, join the choir, and when I was old enough, work for the Red Cross and donate blood.

On Sundays he read stories to us by Ambrose Bearce that were so scary I asked him to read them earlier in the day. He was a tall, handsome, dark-haired man who, in the 1940s was chairman of the Henry County Democrats. Can you believe that?

My father has lived a long and wonderful life, but it is tough for him now and I will miss him terribly. I am forever grateful for him and all that he has given me and what his presence will always mean to me.

Finally, thank you readers for your wonderful responses to my column, which arrive by e-mail, telephone and letters to the editor. Writers love compliments, but even detractors are a boost. We are just glad you read our writing. In this week's column, I hope I have spoken for many of us who have conflicting emotions and share the same joys and heartaches during Thanksgiving and the holidays. Most of us have much for which to be thankful. And our continuous job is to help those who don't.

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